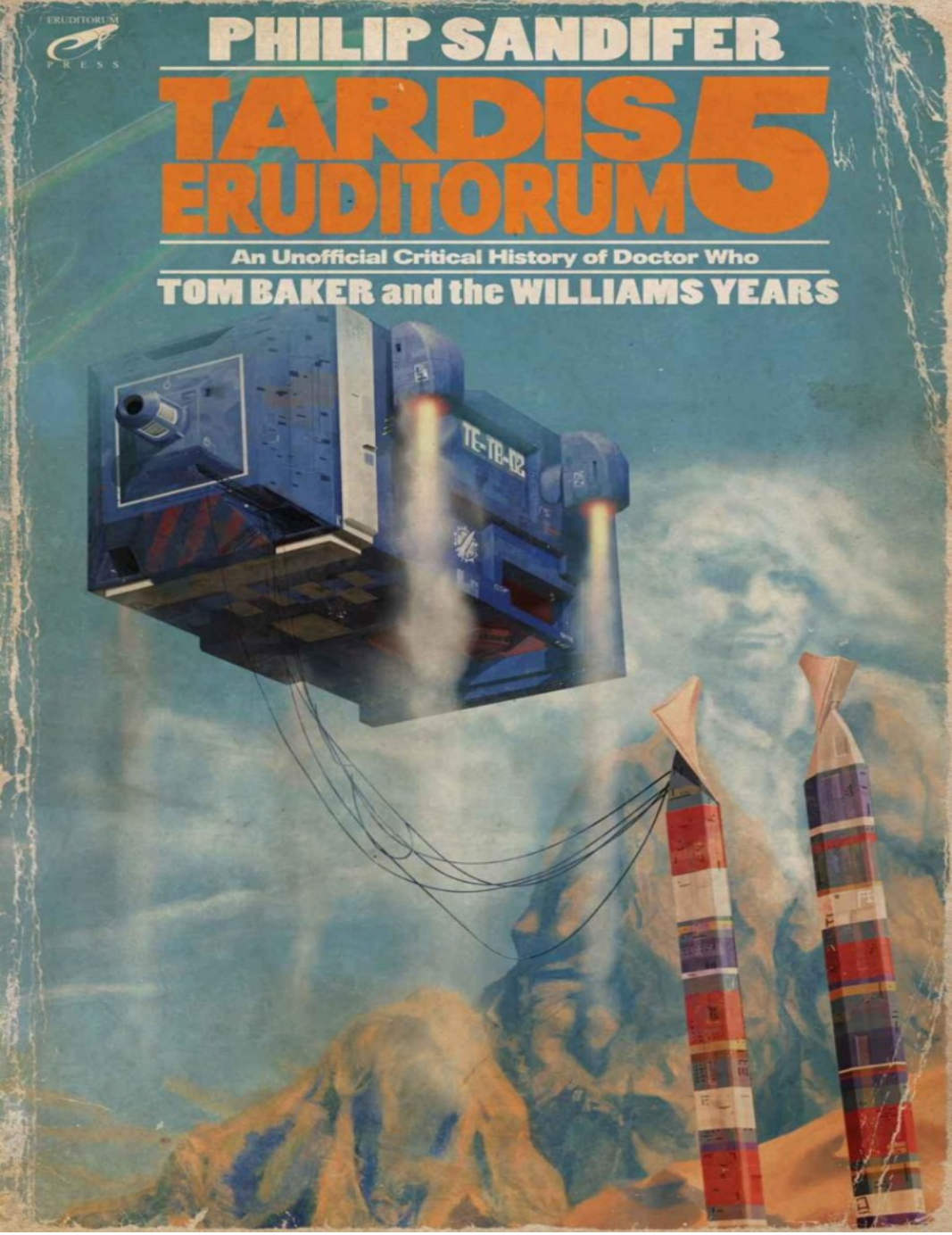
ERUDITORUM PRESS

PHILIP SANDIFER

TARDIS ERUDITORUM 5

An Unofficial Critical History of Doctor Who

TOM BAKER and the WILLIAMS YEARS



TARDIS Eruditorum: An Unauthorized Critical History of Doctor Who
Volume V: Tom Baker and the Williams Years

Philip Sandifer

Copyright 2014, Philip Sandifer
Published by Eruditorum Press
All rights reserved

Doctor Who, the TARDIS, and all related concepts are copyright BBC Worldwide, and are used under the principle of fair use

To my father, for taping all of these episodes off of PBS, albeit not for then taping over them with track meets before I was old enough to watch them.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, to First and foremost, to my wife, Jill Buratto, who puts up with me far more than is strictly speaking necessary.

Second, as ever, to James Taylor for the phenomenal cover art, to Alison J. Campbell for diligent editing and transcribing, and to Gareth Roberts for the obvious.

And, of course, to the readers and commenters who have shaped the book's development. I am phenomenally proud of the community that has formed around *TARDIS Eruditorum*, and profoundly grateful for their support.

Table of Contents

A Mad Man with a Blog (Introduction)

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea: *Target*, The Sex Pistols

I Lived. Everyone Else Died. (*Horror of Fang Rock*)

In the Year 5000, This Was Cutting Edge! (*The Invisible Enemy*)

Wearing a Bit Thin (*Image of the Fendahl*)

Wrong with Authority (*The Sun Makers*)

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*Star Wars*)

Playing Pat-a-Cake with the Wall *(Underworld*)

Meanwhiles and Neverweres (*The Invasion of Time*)

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*Fawlty Towers* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*)

A Trickster or a Warrior (*The Ribos Operation*)

Are the Guardians Canon?

To Fight a Bigger War (*The Pirate Planet*)

Into Submission with My Charm (*The Stones of Blood*)

Not a Time-Travelling Shape-Shifting Robot Operated by Miniaturized Cross People (*The Androids of Tara*)

A Big Mining Thing (*The Power of Kroll*)

Only Ashes (*The Armageddon Factor*)

Time Can Be Rewritten (*The Auntie Matter*)

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea: The Winter of Discontent

The Thing It Does Most Efficiently (*Destiny of the Daleks*)

Brimming With Vast Intelligence (*City of Death*)

They've Taken This Animal and Turned it Into a Joke (*The Creature from the Pit*)

Maybe That Idea Came From Somewhere (*Nightmare of Eden*)

Through an Endless Shifting Maze (*The Horns of Nimon*)

Time Can Be Rewritten (*Festival of Death*)

No Coordinates, No Dimensional Stabiliser (*Shada*)

The *Shada* Variations

Time Can Be Rewritten: *The Well-Mannered War*

More Frocks, Less Guns: An Interview with Gareth Roberts

Is There Such a Thing as the Nathan-Turner Era, and is it a Complete Disaster?

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*Quatermass, Day of the Triffids, Blake's 7, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, Alien, Sapphire and Steel*)

You've Discovered Television (*The Leisure Hive*)

Like a Computer, But There's Something Wrong With It (*Meglos*)

That's The Lion King (*Full Circle*)

Fish from Space (*State of Decay*)

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*2000 AD*)

Going To Be Alone Again (*Warriors' Gate*)
That Jackanapes (*The Keeper of Traken*)
You Were Expecting Someone Else (*Doctor Who Weekly*)
You Were Expecting Someone Else (Alan Moore's Doctor Who Comics)
Recursive Occlusion (*Logopolis*)
Now My Doctor: Tom Baker, Part Two
About the Author

A Mad Man with a Blog (Introduction)

Why hello there! It looks like you bought a copy of the fifth volume of *TARDIS Eruditorum*, which I, as the writer, thank you for, because that probably means you have given me money. (If you haven't given me money and downloaded this off the Internet, on the other hand, I hope you enjoy it and will consider not stealing future volumes, and/or buying a legitimate copy of this one.)

In the unlikely event that you have no idea what book you're holding, let me explain to you, generally speaking, how this book works. First of all, here's what it isn't: a standard issue guidebook to Doctor Who. Yes, it contains individual essays on every Doctor Who story from Tom Baker's last four seasons. And those looking for the nitty-gritty facts of Doctor Who can probably get a decent sense of them by inference, but that's not what this book is for. There are no episode descriptions, cast lists, or lengthy discussions of the behind-the-scenes workings of the show. There are dozens of books that already do that, and a fair number of online sites. Nor is this a book of reviews. For those who want those things, I personally recommend the *Doctor Who Reference Guide*, *Doctor Who Ratings Guide*, and *A Brief History of Time (Travel)* – three superlative websites that were consulted for basically every one of these essays.

What this book *is* is an attempt to tell the story of Doctor Who. Not the story of how it was made, or the overall narrative of the Doctor's life, or anything like that, but the story of the idea that is Doctor Who, from its beginnings in late 1963 to . . . well, early 1977 in the case of this book, but there's more to come. Doctor Who is a rarity in the world – an extremely long-running serialized narrative. Even rarer, it's an extremely long-running serialized narrative that is not in a niche like soap operas or superhero comics – both provinces almost exclusively of die-hard fans. Doctor Who certainly has its die-hard fans (or, as I like to think of you, my target audience), but notably, it's also been, for much of its existence, absolutely mainstream family entertainment for an entire country.

What this means is that the story of Doctor Who is, in one sense, the story of the world from 1963 on. Politics, music, technological and social development, and all manner of other things have crossed paths with Doctor Who over the nearly fifty years of its existence, and by using Doctor Who as a focus, one can tell a story with far wider implications.

The approach I use to do this is one that I've, rather pompously I suppose, dubbed psychochronography. It draws its name from the concept of psychogeography – an artistic movement created by Guy Debord in 1955 and described as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the

geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals." More contemporarily, the term is associated with writers like Iain Sinclair, who writes books describing lengthy walking tours of London that fuse his experience with the history of the places he walks, weaving them into a narrative that tries to tell the entire story of a place, and Alan Moore, who does the same thing while worshiping a snake.

Psychochronography, then, attempts the same feat by walking through time. Where walking through space involves little more than picking a direction and moving your feet rhythmically, walking through time without the aid of a TARDIS is a dodgier proposition. The easiest way is to take a specific object and trace its development through time, looking, as the psychogeographers do, at history, lived experience, and the odd connections that spring up.

And so this book is the first part of a walk through Doctor Who. The essays within it wear a lot of hats, and switch them rapidly. All involve a measure of critical reading (in the literary theory sense, not in the complaining sense) of Doctor Who stories to figure out what they are about. This generally means trying to peel back the onion skins of fan history that cloud a story with things "everybody knows." But it also involves looking at the legacy of stories, which often means looking at that onion skin and trying to explain how it got there. No effort is made to disguise the fact that the first appearance of the Daleks is massive for instance, but on the other hand, the book still looks carefully at what their initial impact might have been.

This approach also means looking at how a story would (and could) have been understood by a savvy viewer of the time, and at how the story can be read as responding to the concerns of its time. That means that the essays tend to be long on cultural context. And, in the end, it also means looking at how I personally interact with these stories. This book has no pretense of objectivity. It is about my walking tour of Doctor Who. I try to be accurate, but I also try to be me.

To fully grab the scope of the topic, in addition to the meat of the book – entries covering all of the Doctor Who stories produced in Tom Baker's final four seasons (that is, the Graham Williams years and the first year of John Nathan-Turner's tenure) – there are four other types of entries. The first are the Time Can Be Rewritten entries. One peculiar feature of Doctor Who is that its past is continually revisited. The bulk of these came in the form of novels written in the '90s and early '00s, but there are other examples. At the time of writing, for instance, Big Finish puts out new stories every year featuring the first eight Doctors. These entries cover occasional highlights from these revisitations, using them as clues to how these earlier eras are widely understood.

The second are the Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea entries, which look at popular media and culture to build context for understanding Doctor Who. These entries usually crop up prior to the bits of Doctor Who they're most relevant for, and provide background and points of comparison for the show as it wrestles with the issues of its many times.

Third, there are the You Were Expecting Someone Else entries, which deal with spinoff material produced concurrently with Doctor Who but that, inevitably, has some significant differences from the approach of the televised material. These exist to give a broader sense of Doctor Who as a cultural object and, perhaps more importantly, because they're kind of fun.

Finally, there are some essays just thrown into the book version as bonuses. These mostly consist of me slogging my way through some established fan debate about Doctor Who and trying, no doubt fruitlessly, to provide the last word on the matter.

It's probably clear by this point that all of these entries began as blog entries on my blog, also called *TARDIS Eruditorum*. This book version, however, revises and expands every entry, as well as adding several new ones – mostly Time Can Be Rewritten entries, but a few others.

To this end, I should thank the many readers of the blog for their gratifying and edifying comments, which have kept the project going through more than one frustrating stretch. I should also thank the giants upon whose shoulders I stand when analyzing Doctor Who – most obviously Paul Cornell, Martin Day, and Keith Topping for *The Discontinuity Guide*, David J. Howe, Mark Stammers, and Stephen James Walker for the Doctor handbooks, Toby Hadoke and Rob Shearman for *Running Through Corridors*, and Lawrence Miles and Tat Wood for the sublimely brilliant *About Time* series, to which this book is a proud footnote.

A final note – although I have expanded and revised the essays in this book from their original online versions, I have not attempted to smooth out the developing style of the entries. Much like the show it follows, this project has evolved and grown since its beginning, and I did not wish to alter that.

But most of all and most importantly, thank you, all of you. But most of all, thank you, dear reader. I hope you enjoy.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea: *Target*, The Sex Pistols

In the fall of 1977, the BBC transmitted a season of television made under what can only be described as trying conditions. The series had changed its producer midway through production, which left the incoming team with a mess of scripts they were not entirely satisfied with and little time to draft replacements. The resulting series was confused and uncertain in tone, and while the show came back for another season, that season in many ways tried to overcorrect for the errors of the previous season and ended up being just as muddled. Plans for a third season were afoot, but were ultimately scuppered when the guy tapped to be the next producer admitted he'd rather just make something else.

This show, obviously, is not Doctor Who, which survived the 1970s in a condition that could more or less be described as "just fine." But it is telling just how much of a near-miss the description is. Ultimately, it is not until the final sentence that anything in the description can clearly be said not to be about Doctor Who. But perhaps more to the point, the show the paragraph does describe, *Target*, was, at least for a moment, the show in the BBC's stable with the most immediate relationship to Doctor Who.

It is perhaps helpful to recap where things stood in mid-1977, as Doctor Who prepared for its fifteenth season and in the gap between the two volumes of *TARDIS Eruditorum* focusing on the Tom Baker years. At the end of 1976, during rehearsals for the penultimate story of Season Fourteen, it was decided that producer Philip Hinchcliffe would be removed from the program in a bid to appease Mary Whitehouse, who had been banging on about the level of violence in the program for some time. The plan settled on was that Hinchcliffe would be moved to yet-to-debut cop drama entitled *Target*, and that the planned producer for that series, Graham Williams, would go to Doctor Who. The latter part of that plan will unfold over the remainder of this book, so let's take a moment and look at the former.

Target fits into a tradition of hard-edged British police dramas, and, broadly speaking, amounted to the BBC's effort to compete with ITV's *The Sweeney* and *The Professionals*. All of these, by their nature, are dramas about hard and tough men who make hard and tough decisions to keep people safe in a hard and tough world. Police dramas are always about a society's anxieties, after all, and this was 1977. Just months after Philip Hinchcliffe took over production of *Target* came the Sex Pistols' single "God Save the Queen," timed with attention-grabbing precision by post-Situationist impresario Malcolm McLaren to coincide with Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. The song's blunt and famous opening: "God save the Queen / The fascist regime" – was controversial by design, and it took

some desperate rigging by the charts to get it to come in behind Rod Stewart instead of actually being the number one single.

Of the post-War 20th century youth subcultures, punk is arguably the most important, by which I mean that loads of people have argued that exact point. This is perhaps strange, given its relatively narrow existence, especially in the UK. There is within punk a strange line between authenticity and performance. The most notable British practitioners are of course the Sex Pistols, whose lore and narrative veers wildly between these two poles. On the one hand there's the romantic independence implied by the story of the famous Lesser Free Trade Hall show in Manchester, a show legendarily attended by only a handful of people, virtually all of whom went on to form major bands. On the other is the management of Malcolm McLaren, who was always attentive to the legend of the band, and who carefully and meticulously courted controversy whenever possible.

Put another way, punk combined a raw and honest sense of anger at the world with an untroubled ostentatiousness that proved intoxicating and unsustainable. By the end of its big year, 1977, Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons were already declaring it dead. But the sheer scale of its excess and anger proved harder to dissipate than the iconography itself, such that everything after punk existed visibly and tangibly in its shadow, a fact that will not so much unfold over the remainder of this book as over the remainder of *TARDIS Eruditorum*.

The Sex Pistols' howl that there's "no future in England's dreaming" clearly struck a chord, in other words, and the sense of decay and collapse implicit in it was clearly a fundamental part of the culture at that moment. The difference between the Sex Pistols and cop dramas like *Target* is that when the Sex Pistols shout that "we're the poison in your human machine / we're the future, your future," they do so with a mocking triumph, gleefully wallowing in the sense of imminent collapse, whereas when *Target* looks at the same sense of rot it shudders and vows to try to fix the world. If police dramas got grittier and harder in the late 70s, it was out of a very British sense that a particular sort of pragmatic "do what needs done" masculinity was the only way out of the morass. In effect, the 1970s British cop show amounts to people trying to keep calm and carry on in the face of a world that would do something as awful as propelling the Sex Pistols to number one, as opposed to one that just put the Nazis in power or something.

For its lead hard and tough man, *Target* employed Patrick Mower as Detective Superintendent Steve Hackett. He's almost precisely what you'd expect the statistical average of 1970s British television detectives to be, and growls his way successfully through a number of scripts, but the truth is that there's little special about the show. Its most notable characteristic, unsurprising given that it's produced by Philip Hinchcliffe, is its commitment to unsparingly showing the violence of its plots. Given Hinchcliffe's history, this can be read in two different ways. On the one hand, it is arguably a scathing indictment of the genre – a show that insists on showing the horrifying reality of the paranoid fantasy

that the genre trades on. On the other, it's equally arguably just a tawdry and overly violent program aimed at the sorts of people who like watching people they've decided are bad guys get roughed up.

The show's highlight is its third episode, which combines a script by Bob Baker and David Martin with direction by Douglas Camfield, all Doctor Who veterans, and features a guest appearance by Katy Manning as a heroin addict, a role she inhabits with genuinely upsetting skill. Baker and Martin prove better than one might expect at writing within a serious and grounded genre, in a way that renders the lack of discipline in many of their Doctor Who scripts all the more frustrating, and Camfield, as one would expect, makes sure everything holds together for an episode that is brutal and nuanced.

But most days, the truth is that the show was a mediocrity. Whatever Hinchcliffe's intentions with the increased violence, the program ended up coming across as a pale imitation of ITV's efforts, only with excessive violence to try to accomplish via prurience what it couldn't via actual quality. In an ironically predictable – or perhaps predictably ironic – twist, the show came under fire from none other than Mary Whitehouse, and Hinchcliffe was ordered to tone down the violence for the second season. Despite scripts by Peter J. Hammond and a not-yet-famous Ken Follet, the second season limped along unsatisfyingly, and although plans for a third season to be produced by *Terror of the Zygons* and *Seeds of Doom* scribe Robert Banks Stewart were underfoot, they were ultimately abandoned in favor of letting Stewart create his own series, called *Shoestring*, with *Target* being largely forgotten, serving mainly as an object lesson that the difference between alchemical brilliance and mediocrity exists almost entirely in small details and decisions, and that it takes almost nothing to come crashing down from being one of the most vibrant creative forces in culture to being a laughable has-been.

I Lived. Everyone Else Died. (*Horror of Fang Rock*)

It's September 3, 1977. Anyone sensing that pop music is going downhill will feel quite vindicated upon seeing that Elvis Presley is at number one with "Way Down," although they will presumably be mollified by realizing that it's only at number one because he died two weeks previously. This means that it stays there for four weeks, with Carly Simon, Donna Summer, and Space, the French pioneers of the space disco subgenre, also charting.

In other news, since *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* and Philip Hinchcliffe's tenure crashed to their conclusions, the Red Army Faction in Germany murdered federal prosecutor and ex-Nazi Siegfried Buback, and then later banker Jürgen Ponto. Residents of Dover, Massachusetts witnessed the Dover Demon on the prowl in one of cryptozoology's iconic moments. Queen Elizabeth II began her Silver Jubilee tour. Shooters opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators in Turkey, killing at least thirty-four. The shooters were never captured, and if you concluded that they were US-funded anti-communist forces you sure as hell wouldn't be the only one. *Star Wars* came out in the US, but we don't care about that so much yet. The Supremes played their final concert in London and disbanded, and the Son of Sam killer was captured in New York, which also enjoyed a 25-hour blackout marked by looting.

During this story: gang violence in San Francisco results in the Golden Dragon massacre, the US agrees to give the Panama Canal to Panama at the end of the century, and the Red Army Faction kidnaps Hanns Martin Schleyer, a major head of what is basically an inverse union – an association of employers. The Faction's goal in this is to secure the release of RAF prisoners by the West German government. Marc Bolan, the glam rock icon better known as T. Rex, dies in a car crash. Oh, and the moment on *Happy Days* that led to the term "jumping the shark" takes place.

While on television, we have a story with fascinating critical dimensions that we need to disentangle before we go much further. The dividing line between this book and the first book of Tom Baker-era essays is, in a broader sense, the dividing line between what, at its most aggressively over-simplified, can be called the good and bad halves of Doctor Who. The first fourteen seasons of Doctor Who – i.e. the ones covered by previous volumes – are all iconic and beloved. No era of Doctor Who has universal acclaim, but they come as close as is feasible, and enjoy a broad consensus as very good television with an iconic role in the British consciousness of the time.

No such consensus exists for the final twelve seasons. It's not that they're hated. Even the generally accepted nadir of Doctor Who, the Colin Baker years, has its firm defenders. But the position that the tenures of Graham Williams

and/or John Nathan-Turner were flat-out unsuccessful is a thoroughly mainstream one in fandom, and, perhaps more to the point, almost undisputed in the layman's cultural narrative of Doctor Who. When *The Doctors Revisited*, a series of overviews of the various Doctors done for the 50th Anniversary, reached Tom Baker, the episode essentially ignored the final four years of Baker's tenure – i.e. the entirety of this book – and focused exclusively on the Hinchcliffe era. The Williams era simply disappears in this narrative, a footnote to the "real" Tom Baker era. This is unfair and ridiculous on several levels, of course, but there's an entire book in which to explore that, so for now let's focus on the beginning of this odd transition.

For all that the Williams era is the beginning of the downhill side of the classic series, it is difficult to think of a classic series story that has had as meteoric a rise in reputation in the last few years as *Horror of Fang Rock*. The only other contenders I can think of that have recently joined the list of all-time classics are *The Power of the Daleks* and *The Massacre*, both of which have a simple explanation for their recent ascent in popularity: the Internet made reconstructions easily available and the stories could finally be widely experienced, which is a prerequisite for classic status. But here we have something odder – a story that sat under our noses more or less unnoticed as anything other than "quite good" for decades, and then recently has become white-hot. Steven Moffat declared it to have the best title of any Doctor Who story ever, it's been singled out for praise on *Doctor Who Confidential*, and both Gareth Roberts and Moffat geeked out about it on Twitter... seemingly everybody loves this story these days.

Slamming the story would be an easy tack to take, in an attempt to become the first voice of the backlash. However, that would involve coming up with several reasons to criticize it, and the story actually is pretty fantastic. So let's try a different angle. Much of the praise for *Horror of Fang Rock* comes from treating it like a holdover from the Hinchcliffe era, and thus unlike the rest of the Williams era. This is not completely unfair. The writer, script editor, director, and stars are all veterans of the Hinchcliffe era, and the aesthetic is closer to the horror aesthetic of the Hinchcliffe era than the more comedic aesthetic that would eventually come (fairly or unfairly) to characterize the Williams era.

It is true that this story is in many ways different from the rest of the Graham Williams era, and different in obvious ways. The Williams era only really went for the horror aesthetic twice, both times in Season Fifteen. This is not the sort of story he's known for. But what's far more interesting, and what critics largely sail over, is the degree to which this story represents a break from the Hinchcliffe era. This is most obvious when people describe the story as being extremely traditional because of its structure of a monster slowly picking off people in an enclosed space. Which, fair enough, is certainly the plot of *The Horror of Fang Rock*.

But it's not really a plot that's associated with the Hinchcliffe era. The only two stories from that era with similar plots are *The Seeds of Doom* and *The Ark in*

Space, and both have a bodily possession dynamic that focuses them on monster-human hybrids instead of straight-up monsters. Most of the Hinchcliffe era's scary stories are about much grander and more epic dangers than a single monster hunting people down. And the Pertwee era certainly didn't have anything even remotely like this. No, pretty much the last time you had a story entirely about monsters picking people off in an enclosed space was, by my count, *The Wheel in Space*. In other words, the show hasn't done a story like this in nearly a decade.

So why does everybody treat this story like a story that is good because it's the lost child of the Hinchcliffe era, as opposed to a story that does its own thing? There are basically two reasons. The first is that treating this story as if it were really a Hinchcliffe story gives Williams's detractors one less story to make an exception for, reducing the list of stories they have to admit were "good" to those few written by Douglas Adams. This, however, is stupid and beneath us, not least because there are some phenomenal Williams-era stories by other writers. The better reason is that, like much of the Hinchcliffe era, it is scary, and the Williams era very quickly made a Mary Whitehouse-decreed move away from that mood.

But there the similarities largely end. The Hinchcliffe era did scary by showing the potency within the dying embers of old myths: Morbius, Sutekh, and Magnus Greel were all terribly dangerous threats who had been defeated in the past and were back for one last, desperate attack. There was always a sense of the epic there. This, on the other hand, is determinedly small scale: a handful of utterly mundane people trapped in a relatively unremarkable setting. It only becomes clear that there's a planetary threat in the fourth episode, and that's basically just a way to eke out another ten minutes of the thing – it's not the primary source of tension in the story at all. The monster isn't some ancient and terrible threat but a generic member of its species. That species would be the Rutans, better known as the sworn enemies of the Sontarans, which is to say that even the monster is little more than the B-side of a B-list monster. This is not what Hinchcliffe would have done at all. Under Hinchcliffe, one imagines it would have actually been *The Beast of Fang Rock*, chained under the sea millennia ago by an ancient race of aliens, and sending out its electricity-wielding servants to gather power for its resurrection. Instead of, you know, a cranky alien jellyfish.

It would take a ridiculously narrow viewpoint of what Doctor Who is good for, even by the standards of Doctor Who fans, to conclude that the smaller approach is in some way a bad thing. After all, so much of what is wrong with the worst moments of the Hinchcliffe era comes when the play of ideas and genres is allowed to get in the way of any investment in humanity, a problem that even Robert Holmes egregiously suffered from by the end of the era. More to the point, there is something to be said for how radical it was to do a small story. The Hinchcliffe era's embrace of the epic led to the steady abandonment of contemporary Earth, and with that came with the understandable but ultimately unnecessary consequence of moving away from the domestic scale commonly

described within fandom as "Yeti-in-a-Loo." Deciding to do something smaller and more intimate is, in a genuine sense, brave.

As I said, this is understandable – as you determinedly move from Earth to outer space it's natural to move from earthly stakes to cosmic stakes for your stories. But Robert Holmes often took delightful measures to undercut the vast stakes, whether by allowing the Doctor to gently mock the story or by having his villains envy vegetables. And no surprise – it was Holmes who showed, in the Pertwee era, how effective it could be to shrink the stakes away from the planetary to the utterly mundane. Because the shift from the freewheeling travel of the Troughton years (where the stakes often were smaller) to the Earth-based format of the Pertwee years meant that every threat became a planetary one, and Holmes rightly observed that you could do a good story on a smaller scale. Despite this, the scale had drifted ever upward, and Terrance Dicks was shrewd to pull it back down for *Horror of Fang Rock*.

What's of further interest is that he manages to do that while retaining many of the cultural ideas from the previous story. This story, in terms of history, isn't chronologically that far away from *Talons* – it's technically in the Edwardian era, but that is in many ways just an incremental upgrade of the Victorian era to fill the awkward calendar space between Queen Victoria's death and World War I, which brought the real shift in culture. (There is an analogy to be drawn here to the difference between marking eras in Doctor Who by lead actor and marking them by producer. Particularly snide fans may wish to note that you can make this analogy in such a way as to have John Nathan-Turner be equivalent to World War I.)

But instead of the elaborate genre parodies of Robert Holmes, Terrance Dicks takes a more materialist approach. Yes, he still has old-fashioned people to serve as comic relief, but they're not caricatures in the way that Holmes's Victorians are, and in some ways this deepens the social commentary given by *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, moving into the ways in which class and privilege actually affect people, instead of just satirizing it. Plus, it doesn't have any horrible racist stereotypes in which Chinese characters are played by white people in bad makeup, so that's nice too.

In other ways, however, there's a step backwards. Leela continues to fade away from what was originally interesting about the character. It is by this point increasingly obvious that she's not being allowed to develop as a character, so that her ignorance and "savagery" can be used for humor, which is even more demeaning than "educating" her was. Where she used to have her own peculiar instincts that originated out of her culture, now she just seems to have superpowers allowing her to detect small changes in temperature. Given that there will be a tin dog to do that starting next story, one shudders to imagine what she'll be cut down to next.

But despite that, she gets well used here in a variety of ways. The Doctor visibly prefers talking to her than to any of the other characters, and her easy competence contrasts well with their period-appropriate foibles. In this regard

she is made a critique of aspects of the culture without having to resort to everybody laughing as she comically misunderstands tea, or reflecting on how her simple savage wisdom has insight that even civilized British people can learn from. There may be no more scathing moment of feminism in the show to date than Leela's scorn for Adelaide and all of the implied scorn for the cultural norms she represents.

The Doctor, on the other hand, is more problematic. It's shocking how sharp the change in Baker's performance is here. This is the second major change in his performance, and like the first (which came when Lis Sladen left), it comes along with a major creative departure. When Paddy Russell directed *The Pyramids of Mars*, she was able to coax Baker into actually donning a giant robot mummy costume that the Doctor was supposed to be hiding inside of. That sort of ability to control and restrain Baker seems utterly absent this time: he dominates the frame whenever he's on camera, standing in the center of the shot as characters buzz around him – the polar opposite of how he entered in *Robot*. Behind the scenes, his antics were flaring up as well. This was, apparently, the story in which Louise Jameson finally put her foot down and stood up to Baker, winning his respect, but on the other hand his relationship with Russell was a disaster.

The result is a Doctor who is a complete emotional cipher, with the actor simply trusting that the audience will adore him as long as he turns on the charm. It's a performance of pure egotism that only works because Baker is actually charming enough to pull it off. The scene in which he delightedly informs everyone that they may be dead by morning is heavenly, and his mocking dismissal of the villain is sharp and vibrant in a way that previous efforts at it never quite hit. Even without knowing what's going on behind the scenes there's a palpable anger to Baker's defiance now, giving it just a tinge of punk at a point where both the series and punk were still credible enough for that to mean something.

The script also seems aware of the increasingly problematic dimensions of Baker's incarnation. It makes the interesting decision to have the Doctor be very much responsible for some of what goes wrong. And, of course, there's the gutsy decision to have this one be a total wipeout for the supporting cast. For the first time in the series absolutely every character not played by a series regular ends up dead. And unlike many of the later contenders for massive body counts, here they're not just done for flair: each marks a concrete turning point in the plot, driving it forward. Everybody dies in this story, but nobody dies just for spectacle, nor is there the sense that plagues many of Robert Holmes's stories of the writer killing off characters just because they've become inconvenient. Yes, *Horror of Fang Rock* keeps the bodies off-screen in what is a clear concession to Mary Whitehouse, but it gives a better sense of the sheer human cost of the Doctor's life than anything since *The Massacre*.

This makes the Doctor's capriciousness more problematic. But at this point that's all it is – a case of complicating the tone of the show. It's a very distinct

step in a particular direction for the series, but unlike most of the later steps in that direction, it's utterly unselfconscious about it. In this regard it serves as a final comment upon the metafictional excess of the Hinchcliffe era. It does this without resorting to broad symbolism, pastiche, or self-reference, but just by telling a particular story with a particular character and letting the frisson between those two reveal something on its own. It's deft and subtle in an absolutely delicious way.

It would be stretching it far too much to call this story a critique of the Hinchcliffe era. It's not. But it is in many ways a diagnostic of it, and a demonstration of what aspects of it are merely the preferences and defaults of its major creative figures and what aspects of it are actually integral to generating the amazing aesthetic effects it so often accomplished. It is in this regard the most sensible statement possible in the face of the battering the show just took: here is what we are good at. Traditionalism has never been so radical.

In the Year 5000, This Was Cutting Edge! (*The Invisible Enemy*)

It's October 1, 1977. The late Elvis Presley remains at number one with "Way Down." One week later he's unseated by David Soul with "Silver Lady," which holds at number one for the remaining three weeks. Yes, Rod Stewart, The Stranglers, and Meco also chart, the latter with a recording of the *Star Wars* theme, although that movie won't premiere in the UK for another two months.

In real news, four Palestinians hijack a Lufthansa flight to Somalia to demand the release of members of the Red Army Faction. Five days later an unusually large number of Red Army Faction members commit suicide in prison in a manner that is not the least bit suspicious. Pele retires from professional soccer, Queen Elizabeth II opens the Canadian Parliament, Anita Bryant is hit in the face with a pie by gay rights activists, and the Atari 2600 is released.

While on television we have *The Invisible Enemy*. There are some stories that nobody, ever, has identified as their favorite Doctor Who story, and *The Invisible Enemy* is a prime example of that species. It would be nice to insert a sentence beginning, "It's not that the story is bad, but…" at this point, just to keep with the general ethos of offering redemptive readings that *TARDIS Eruditorum* subscribes to, but there's a major barrier to that, which is that the story is bad. It's bad in a way Doctor Who hasn't really been in a long time. The last time a story was this particular flavor of bad was back in the Pertwee era with *The Time Monster*. Which is, actually, a decent starting point for a comparison. Most of the same ingredients are on display here: a script from writers known to have some specific and severe weaknesses, a particularly egregious set of failures on the part of the design departments, and a handful of acting performances that would be much improved if they were forgettable.

But because the series has kept the basic quality level so high for so long – only *The Monster of Peladon* and *The Android Invasion* have really been full-out turkeys over the five seasons between *The Time Monster* and this – there's something jarring about hitting *The Invisible Enemy*. Part of it is, perhaps, the fan's knowledge that, far from being the freakish anomaly it appears to be when you reach it chronologically, it's the first of many stories over the next few years that are this bad. Fifty percent of the bottom ten stories and over sixty percent of the bottom quarter of stories in the *Doctor Who Magazine* 50th Anniversary poll come from the Williams or Nathan-Turner eras of the classic series, whereas only six stories make it into the top quarter, a measly ten percent. Après *Croc Roches*, le déluge. But more of it, I think, is just the sheer size of the gulf in quality between this and *Talons of Weng-Chiang*, which was the story made before it. It's difficult to believe that the same people are making it.

Which, of course, they aren't. But there's a risky slippage that goes on here.

Yes, this is the first bad story of the Graham Williams era. But it's also, in production terms, the first story of the Graham Williams era outright. As tempting as it is to look at this story as characteristic of the entire era's supposed faults, we ought to be careful simply because it is profoundly unlikely that its flaws are explicable in terms of the general faults of the new regime. For one thing, this is mostly still the old regime. The cast is the same, Holmes is still in place, Baker and Martin are old pros of writers. Only Graham Williams and the director (who never returned to the series) are actually new blood, and having just inherited the job, it's not like he's had time to put his stamp on the program yet. In fact, most of this story comes off as a standard "safe pair of hands" sort of story. Baker and Martin, at this point seven-season veterans of the program, are, along with Terrance Dicks and Robert Holmes (both of whom also get scripts this season) the longest-standing writers in the pool. They're the sort of people you hire because you expect to get a reasonably well-executed standard-issue Doctor Who script, say because it's your first story and you don't want to have to worry about it too much. But that makes the sudden drop in quality even weirder.

The only area one can point to and say, "Right *there* is a predictable and understandable decline in quality," are the effects. There is a cheap shoddiness to *The Invisible Enemy* that just wasn't really seen in the Hinchcliffe era. Sure, the Hinchcliffe era had its howlers of bad effects – the Skarasen or the giant rat, for instance. But both of those were lone howlers in the middle of stories that for the most part were quite visually distinctive. *Terror of the Zygons* had the fantastic Zygon designs, for instance, and *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* had the fantastic everything-that-wasn't-a-giant-rat. The Hinchcliffe era did a masterful job of believing its bubble wrap, with only a handful of big slip-ups.

This cannot be said of this story. Most of its design work is utterly dull – a grotesque expanse of generic white corridors. Some of it is downright wretched, though it seems churlish to complain too much about the bad CSO work in this story when *Underworld* looms on the horizon. And then there's the giant sex pervert shrimp, about which, having described it thusly, I honestly can't think of anything else to say. The only piece of design that's even remotely decent in this story is K-9, and even there they had to amortize the cost out across the entire season by making him a regular (on the advice of John Nathan-Turner, according to *About Time*, or of Williams and Holmes, according to Shannon O'Sullivan). And even with that, they still had to replace the prop at the end of the season because of how poorly it worked.

There are two big reasons for this downturn in quality. The first is that Hinchcliffe, upon being sacked, directed the designers on the show not to worry about the budgets in the final two stories of his tenure, knowing full well that this would result in punitive budget cuts for Season Fifteen. But even ignoring that, the UK was in the midst of an economic disaster and staring down massive inflation. About a year before this story the UK had to take out a loan from the IMF, which on the one hand illustrates how bad things were, and on the other

caused a raft of problems of its own as the IMF, being the IMF, imposed various conditions on the loan. Accordingly, there was just less money to spend, and that money was worth less than it had been a year earlier. The confluence of these two problems means that Doctor Who, after fourteen years of beating the odds, finally succumbs to the inevitable and starts missing more often than it hits on design.

But even there, most of *The Invisible Enemy*'s design work is just unimpressive as opposed to overtly bad. And we're watching the show nearly thirty-five years after it was produced. Frankly, to a modern viewer all of Doctor Who looks cheap. That doesn't mean it's not possible to identify the stories that look cheaper than all the others, but bad effects just aren't as visible a problem watching these episodes now. Sure, *The Invisible Enemy* marked a sharp decline in the effects quality, and that was visible at the time, but this in itself is not enough to make it the enduring turkey that it is.

There is also, of course, the matter of Baker and Martin. Most Doctor Who writers decline eventually, as we've said before, and Baker and Martin are in the latter half of their time on the show: this is the sixth of their eight stories (plus a ninth for Baker on his own). On top of that, they've always been a pair of writers with known problems. They are a classic case, in fact, of writers whose biggest strength and biggest weakness are identical. The major advantage they bring to the table is that they are replete with big, very cool-seeming ideas. The major disadvantage is that this makes them more likely to simply come up with a new idea instead of adequately exploring the ones they have, which leaves their stories with a frustrating superficiality.

And here they're thrown into a situation that is almost a perfect storm of things that are not good for them. In the midst of the fallout from the bewildering "taking Mary Whitehouse seriously" debacle, Williams was instructed to dial back on the scariness of the show and to get it to be family entertainment again. Never mind that this profoundly misunderstands the nature of the Hinchcliffe era (which was, in fact, more perfectly child-targeted than any other era of the classic series), this is the exact wrong brief to give to Baker and Martin.

It's an easy enough mistake to make. A tour of their previous five scripts reveals little fondness for the overt horror or violence that the BBC was trying to move away from with the program and a reasonable number of kid-friendly concepts. In terms of making Doctor Who that wasn't going to look much like *The Deadly Assassin*, they were unquestionably safe bets. The problem is that the absolute last thing Baker and Martin should be told is to keep things kid-friendly. They're already prone to skip out on complex exploration of a concept in favor of moving on to another idea. When told to write to children they become unbearable in their superficiality.

Which also captures the basic problem with *The Invisible Enemy* – a problem that, crucially, it doesn't share with large swaths of the Williams era. There is a school of thought that says that the biggest problem with the Williams era is that it has too many jokes in it. The new series should have put a final nail in the

casket of the idea that humor comes at the expense of other elements (as Moffat himself has pointed out, *The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances* may be one of the scariest stories of the new series, but every other line in it is a joke), but watching *The Invisible Enemy* at least gives a pretty good understanding of what their point is.

The problem, though, isn't the excess of jokes so much as the dearth of actual humor. Jokes about whether K-9 is TARDIS trained, Marius being played as a comedy German, and all of the *Fantastic Voyage*-style gags were, for lack of a better word, juvenile. It's the basest sort of humor imaginable – the story goes out on a poop joke, for God's sake. Simply put, the jokes in this episode aren't just written for eight-year-olds, they're written for a terribly cynical idea of what eight-year-olds are like.

This, however, is characteristic of the rest of *The Invisible Enemy*. Baker and Martin have ideas here that are wholly consistent with the Hinchcliffe era, but they do absolutely nothing with them. The virus that serves as the enemy in this story is a great idea: it preys on thoughts and seems to literally *be* an idea. Except then, when it comes time for the fourth episode, they turn it into a giant shrimp and make it susceptible to basic explosions. The idea is actually almost identical to that of the Weeping Angels in *The Time of Angels* – a possession-based creature that attacks you by looking at you and slowly possesses you from inside your mind. But having come up with a brilliant idea, they ditch it for a prawn.

Similarly bad is the idea of sending clones of the Doctor and Leela into the Doctor's body to chase out the nucleus. On paper it's brilliant. Short-lived clones with all the personalities and memories of the original? You could write an entire ninety minutes about the ethical implications of that. (Indeed, once again, the Moffat era did.) Or you could ignore them entirely, have the clones conveniently drop dead, and do nothing with the idea other than use it to link Part Two to Part Four. It's not only pathetic, it's offensively so – a case of the show seemingly assuming that nobody watching cares enough to want to see the ideas worked through.

But as much of a problem as this is – and in terms of this story it's a huge problem that accounts for most of why the story doesn't work – it's not exactly an error that's hard to understand. Past-their-prime writers working panic-stricken to new standards under a new producer, and trying not to offend anybody, were never going to work out for Doctor Who. Expecting better than this for the first story out of the gate for anyone picking up after the Mary Whitehouse debacle would have been a stretch. I'd speculate that things would improve, but we already know they did – the next story made was *Fang Rock*, which was superlative. Even when the series next goes off the rails – and it does so alarmingly soon – it makes a different set of mistakes than this. Far from being a harbinger of bad things to come, this is a one-off misfire that sprung from a particularly ill-advised pairing of writer and brief.

All of which said, it's not as though there aren't larger issues in play as well. The faults of this story are understandable as an idiosyncratic mess. But this is

one of three stories this season with production faults that can be described as "cataclysmic" without particular exaggeration beyond the idea that the low quality of a 1970s sci-fi show can ever qualify as a cataclysm. The mistakes of this story are unique to this story. But the climate that led to them, namely a show that is more interested in making sure nobody yells at it than it is in being good, is a larger problem.

Wearing a Bit Thin (*Image of the Fendahl*)

It's October 29th, 1977. Baccara, a Spanish vocal duo that represented Luxembourg in the 1978 Eurovision contest with a song entitled "Parlez-vous Français?" are at number one with "Yes Sir I Can Boogie." This moment of utter nationalistic confusion is short-lived, and ABBA takes over with "Name of the Game" one week later and holds it through the end of this story. Rod Stewart, Queen, The Carpenters, The Bee Gees, and the Sex Pistols also chart. The latter also have their memorably titled "Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols" album come out the day before the first episode of this story airs.

In other news, Harvey Milk is elected City Supervisor of San Francisco. Anwar Sadat visits Israel, while General Hugo Banzer, leader of the military government in Bolivia, moves the date for the transition back to a constitutional democracy up two years to 1978. (In practice this would go poorly when Banzer's supporters attempted to steal the election.) And Greek archeologist Manolis Andronikos locates the tomb of Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great.

While on television, Doctor Who continues the wheel-spinning that defines its fifteenth season. I'm not entirely convinced that the 1970s actually have a story less likely than this one to evoke strong opinions in people. Nobody loves it. Nobody hates it. It's pretty much the third best story in the weakest season of the '70s, and that's about what there is to say. Tat Wood's defense of it in *About Time* amounts to, "Well, it's better than *The Daemons*," which is true enough, but hardly inspiring. Lawrence Miles dislikes the tell-don't-show style of the exposition. And most of the online reviews are masterpieces of the "a little good, a little bad" formula of online reviews. At 122 in the Doctor Who Magazine 50th Anniversary poll, almost smack dab in the middle, it seems like "a little good, a little bad" is pretty much the default consensus.

Watching it, it's easy enough to see why. Much like *The Invisible Enemy*, this is largely Doctor-Who-by-numbers. Unlike *The Invisible Enemy*, though, it's Chris Boucher writing, and he's good enough to avoid massive embarrassment. Even still, of his three scripts for the series it's very difficult to muster anything resembling an argument that this isn't his weakest. Whereas *The Face of Evil* was a thrilling deconstruction of the entire series and *The Robots of Death* was a particularly adroit and complex genre piece that commented extensively on its parent genre, this is... a very good rewriting of *Quatermass*.

The reasoning is simple enough. As with *The Invisible Enemy* before it, this is a story that seeks to avoid ruffling any feathers – what you would expect, in other words, from a series under an edict to stop being so controversial. It's in the horror mode that's familiar to Doctor Who, but even this is largely defanged,

with the violence actively kept off-screen. There are a few good scares, but for the most part this looks like what it is: a toned-down horror script. Williams is still trying to make traditional Doctor Who without upsetting people, and while he doesn't miss here, he doesn't really hit anything either.

Part of it is that this von Däniken-style plot is showing its age. Far from being a creative and exciting frisson of science fiction and established culture, at this point it's just a sort of tiresome recitation of clichés. Oh, a human-looking skull millions of years too old to be a human skull. I wonder what it could possibly be.

About Time makes the argument that over the course of eight years the implicit lack of regard for historical cultures – a variation on the prejudices inherent in Leela's character – was proving untenable as archeology revealed increasingly old and complex forms of human behavior. And so the trend, as Miles and Wood explain it, was towards explaining the oddities of contemporary human behavior in terms of how they made sense in historical situations – a case of the "history reiterates" logic we've been discussing for ages manifesting in the intellectual mainstream.

It's a perfectly plausible explanation for how these signifiers have changed over the nearly seven years we've been tracking them, but Miles and Wood hit a wall when they try to apply it to this story. The best they can come up with is that Boucher "came up with a neat, all-encompassing theory which happens not to be true, just to show how easy it is to 'account' for all of human nature." But while Boucher is not as much the arch-rationalist as some people (including at times himself, as *Corpse Marker* showed) make him out to be, it's still a bit of a reach to believe that he'd make a move like that. It's not, after all, as though the story contains anything other than its basic fictionality that would make it a comment on the believability of untrue things.

Despite this, there is something to Miles and Wood's point worth exploring. They are, after all, right about the way in which the von Dänikenism is different in this story than it had been in past stories. In this story things are explained not in terms of alien cultures directly influencing us – the Osirans becoming the Egyptian gods, for instance, or the Daemons' science becoming our magic – but in terms of our reacting against an alien race. The Fendahl is purely animalistic in a way past ancient aliens were not, serving not as models or influences but as an ancient monster that humanity has forgotten how to be properly afraid of. The superstitions that the story looks at are largely reactions against the Fendahl, and where the Fendahl has an active plan it seems to have achieved it through subtle manipulation of the entire arc of history, not through any direct interaction with people.

In other words, what's interesting here isn't the breadth of what can be explained but rather the sorts of explanations. The Fendahl is something we haven't really seen before: a monster that is, in a literal sense, history itself. The Fendahl is the teleology that history has been progressing towards. No wonder it's one of the ancient and mythic enemies of the Time Lords and a species they

apparently attempted the genocide of.

It should be noted, however, that this plot point does not make a damn bit of sense. The last thing the Time Lords appear to be are scrupulous record-keepers, given the number of times they've been taken by surprise, had key files stolen, or had no idea what was going on with their own history. On top of that, the Time Lords are usually disdainful or unaware of the existence of Earth, which is rather strange for a planet so close to the site of their genocide. At this point it is increasingly becoming necessary to just stop trying to reconcile the various claims about the nature of the Time Lords. Three of the six stories this season feature Time Lords or Time Lord history as major plot points, and the number of distinct perspectives on the Time Lords offered by these stories may well be even greater.

Nevertheless, it's worth highlighting the ways in which this is a break from the Hinchcliffe era. In the Hinchcliffe era, when dread threats from the past emerged anew it was a fear of history repeating itself. But now we've moved our focus beyond that – it's no longer a matter of history repeating itself or of the bones of the past emerging to haunt us, but of the process of history itself consuming us. History goes from being a source of horror to the object of horror itself.

But even if the Time Lords can no longer reliably be treated as the keepers of the arc of history (or as anything other than a plot contrivance to turn the volume on a story up to eleven), the basic ideas underlying that interpretation of them have, by this point, become deeply entrenched in the program's DNA. Even if it doesn't quite parse in relation to the rest of the series, the basic idea of a threat that is literally a force of history is compelling. Sufficiently so that the appearance of the Fendahleen ends up not even being the most Freudian thing about this story. The Fendahl is the death drive itself – not a phenomenon of history but an engine of it.

In other words, on paper this is another very sensible development of the ideas of the Hinchcliffe era. But in execution, none of the potential of this idea comes through. And to a large extent, it fails to come through in a way that helps us clarify the damage done by Mary Whitehouse. The Hinchcliffe era was packed with ideas, yes, but the end point of those ideas was usually their uncanniness. This was central to what the show did in the Hinchcliffe era. It avoided establishing its own clear ideology in favor of a Situationist style of critique whereby it juxtaposes various stories, genres, and historical idioms in such a way as to produce uncanny and lurking horror. It was tremendously effective at that.

But, crucially, it only worked because of the uncanny and lurking horror. The Hinchcliffe era wasn't just intellectual masturbation with high concepts, but an exploration of the nightmares that lurk within cultural memory. The fear wasn't just a handy tool to hook kids, it was part and parcel of the overall effect. And so when you make a story like this in such a way as to spend more time fretting over exactly how to shoot Stael's suicide than over the storytelling – trying, in essence, to make it less disturbing and less memorable, you lose

something.

And so, in an odd sense, *Image of the Fendahl* reveals the problems with the Hinchcliffe/Holmes era (since this is Robert Holmes's last story as script editor, at least in production order) even better than the racism of *Talons* did. (And it's not as though *Image of the Fendahl* doesn't have its own problems with offensiveness – there's a really nasty thread of "women as destructive creatures" running through this story.) Without a fully satisfying and developed sense of uncanny horror this story has nothing to fall back on but its ideas. And its ideas are... limited. I mean, don't get me wrong – a monster that is the death drive is brilliant. But the execution...

See, Miles and Wood point something out about this story that's a massive and glaring error. The Fendahl skull was supposedly found in Kenya. Human civilization also came out of Africa. But every single cultural trope that is explained in terms of the Fendahl – triskaidekaphobia or the use of salt for ritual protection – is a European cultural trope. This is grotesque in its cultural imperialism. But more to the point, it just undermines and sandbags the entire story. If the story is about the ideas of cultural history and the death drive and the ancient development of humanity then the last thing you want to do is steamroll the bulk of the planet and treat it like the whole world is British. I mean, it's just crass. (Ironically, this is the sort of thing that the Williams era will later become obsessed with – avoiding showing any planet as a monoculture.)

This, however, is symptomatic of a larger problem. Drained of the uncanny and uncomfortable horror, this approach of broadly playing with ideas loses its postmodernism and becomes an Enlightenment liberalism master narrative about establishing what all of humanity is like. And any such narrative is mostly just going to end up further solidifying the relationship between those who have power and are telling the story and those who exist on the margins. Of course when the BBC does a story about the fundamental nature of humanity it's horrifyingly Eurocentric. Anyone's story about the fundamental nature of humanity is going to put themselves and their culture at the center of it. This game becomes masturbatory fast, and not in ways Boucher seems to be making any sort of commentary on.

When the things we find by exploring the concepts turn out to be dark and obscure horrors then this sort of universalizing works. There is something deeply and unsettlingly compelling about placing one's self in the center of the universe and then seeing that the universe is full of nightmares. But the approach simply does not work when you bend over backwards to avoid upsetting anybody. And through and through, *Image of the Fendahl* seems uninterested in pushing its audience, which was, in the end, what the Hinchcliffe era's horror was all about. As a result it becomes a piece of nasty sadism in a way that the Hinchcliffe era mostly avoided. And, of course, it further pins down the series to talking about what was: three stories into the Williams era, we're still stuck mainly comparing it to what came before instead of allowing it to define itself.

Clearly some new approach has to be found. But, frankly, what? How can

Whitakerian alchemy, in all its anarchic and mercurial glory, possibly work in a manner designed not to offend and not to upset? How, in short, do you create a domesticated and friendly sort of anarchist? Especially in a world where the glorious and willful ugliness of punk is rapidly and effectively expanding. This is in no way an easy aesthetic question, and frankly, it would take a genius to find a way forward out of all of this.

Good thing Doctor Who still has one of those around.

Wrong with Authority (*The Sun Makers*)

It's November 26, 1977. ABBA remain at number one with "Name of the Game," but are overtaken by Wings with "Mull of Kintyre," a Paul McCartney-penned ode to Scotland that will manage a nine-week run at number one that will keep it in place through Christmas and, indeed, through the next story. Queen, the Bee Gees, and the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band also chart.

In real news, British Airways establishes regular Concorde service between New York and London. The International Fund for Agricultural Development is established at the UN. The President of the Central African Republic declares himself emperor, and in the US the cable channel Nickelodeon launches, albeit under its original name of Pinwheel, which would last about eighteen months before the channel relaunched under its current name.

While on television we have Robert Holmes, frequent genius and occasional cynical dick, penning his departure script. This was actually filmed prior to *Image of the Fendahl*, the script under which Holmes actually departed, with Anthony Read picking up midway through. But in running order it serves to continue the spurious tradition Dicks cited of the outgoing script editor getting a script on or around his departure date. (Actually, as I noted at the time Dicks pulled the trick on Holmes, the tradition was kind of real. In practice, Dicks was the seventh regular script editor of Doctor Who, and four of his six predecessors got a writing credit in the story after they left.)

The Sun Makers is a bit of an odd duck. Much like *Horror of Fang Rock*, it's a story that's currently trendy to enjoy. But whereas *Fang Rock* is very much a rediscovered classic that everyone now appreciates, *The Sun Makers* serves as more of a shibboleth – a story used to determine whether someone is a trendy Doctor Who fan or simply a traditionalist spouting received wisdom. "Real fans" love this story as an overlooked classic.

Except, of course, the problem with trendy classics is that they inevitably spawn countertrends. Now that everyone knows to revere *The Sun Makers* as an inadvertent triumph for Robert Holmes, the trendy thing to do is rapidly becoming to complain about it. The easiest way to do this is to be political about it, which is easy enough if you're a leftist nut job like me, because this story is overtly a political satire about the horrors of taxes. Its origins come in Holmes being frustrated at the way he was taxed as having two jobs due to the particulars of paperwork when he wrote *The Deadly Assassin* for Season Fourteen while also serving as script editor. Which makes it, in 2014, a story that seems to instinctively ally with the worst instincts of the political right in both the US and UK.

This is not quite fair, though. First of all, a blanket position that taxes are

always good is as ludicrous as the idea that they should always be lower no matter what. The relationship between taxation and the economy is very complex and does not reduce well into a position that they should always go up or always go down. This, of course, bodes poorly in a two-party system in which one gets to vote for, essentially, a lever to push them up or down instead of for an actually coherent plan. In reality, of course, there is such a thing as excessive taxation, just like there's such a thing as insufficient taxation. To claim that it is impossible for taxes to be unjust is simply absurd. I have no idea whether the tax situation Robert Holmes was pissed about – an issue having to do with the government treating him as having two jobs when he was simultaneously script-editing and writing Doctor Who in Season Fourteen – was, in fact, excessive and unfair. But it's certainly possible that it was. Injustices of this sort happen, even in the criminally under-taxed US.

But even if it weren't, the topical snarking about taxes is just a specific occasion for a more fundamental sort of moral critique. Holmes may be a misanthropic, petty cynic, but even he wouldn't write a story that consists purely of him whining about his tax problems. And so there has to be a broader issue in this story, and it's one that gives it an altogether more sympathetic viewpoint. Some time ago, in the comments of the blog, I made the assertion that Robert Holmes was a liberal's conservative. This, more than just about any other Holmes script, demonstrates the point: as much as it may be a bit of a reactionary story about taxation, it's also a story about exploitative labor conditions, and one that borders on being overtly Marxist. Taxes may be what the company's exploitation of the population is called, but let's pause for a moment and look at exactly how Pluto works. This is not a story of a corrupt or greedy government; it's a story about a private company that runs the city and is seeking to make a profit by recklessly overcharging citizens for everything.

So while the oppression may be called taxes, the villain may be made to look like Denis Healey, and the hallways may be named after British tax forms, in the end this is a story about the greed of the powerful, and specifically the greed of businesses. The scene at the start about death taxes (with its wickedly funny moment in which Cordo's father's life savings are revealed to be worth less than his corpse) is far more cold-blooded than what a faceless bureaucracy can typically muster. It takes the greed of an individual to be that viciously cruel.

But more broadly, the real moral hook of this story is the fact that the population of Megropolis One is forced to work themselves to death. The people are seen as nothing more than disposable labor sources with no value beyond their material production. It's not a story about unfair tax surprises that screw people over; it's a story about a world where no amount of work will ever make ends meet because the people in power want everything. And this is why Holmes is a liberal's conservative. One of the fundamental tenets of contemporary liberalism is Carol Hanisch's famous observation that "the personal is political." (In this regard, all of contemporary liberalism is essentially just a subset of feminism.) And that declaration lies at the heart of this story. It's

not about the nature of the oppression, but about the way in which the oppression is experienced. Holmes is writing a story about the way in which an oppressive economic system ruins individual lives. Again, we ought to turn to the amazing opening scene in which Cordo is put into debt slavery over his father's death taxes. The sadism of this scene transcends the fact that it's about an evil tax collector. It's about the way in which the system bullies and destroys people for its own benefit. And it culminates in the most emotionally charged moment Holmes has ever written: the scene in which Cordo, despairing at his inability to ever pay off his debts, attempts suicide.

The sheer power of this hook doesn't just draw the Doctor into the plot, it gives this story a screaming moral charge. The entire moral foundation of this story comes not out of a philosophical argument about the appropriate level of taxation, nor out of a cranky writer who got screwed by Inland Revenue, but out of a single man's humiliation and shame at being unable to make it in the world. And the story builds from that to a media-savvy revolution in the grand workers' rebellion sense. The Doctor shows up and overthrows the government because it's a bunch of bullying profiteers using bureaucracy to justify torture, and because they drove a man to suicide. Other than the detail of it ostensibly being about taxes, this is one of the most furiously, passionately left-wing stories in Doctor Who – it's practically an anarchist screed. And it goes to incredibly dark, furious places – the story ends with the Gatherer who drove Cordo to suicide being thrown off the roof by an angry mob. It's an unrepentantly populist scream of rage at a method of oppression.

What's interesting, then, is that this comes in a period where the show is otherwise being self-consciously timid and trying not to rock the boat. How on Earth did it manage to do this story in the midst of all of that? The answer, to some extent, is that it leans into the problem. Instead of trying to do defanged Hinchcliffe-era stuff or just being cheap and silly, it determinately does its own thing. Which is not to say that it doesn't look cheap – it does. It's silly too. But it's a story that adamantly refuses to be defined by those two adjectives. In other words, this marks the point in which Doctor Who really starts to figure out how to be cheap and silly without being trivial.

See, there are some advantages to cheapness. Simply put, it lowers the stakes. It makes the show look harmless. If Doctor Who is going to be publicly ordered to be less serious, then it may as well look cheap. Poof. Problem solved. It is now self-evidently not serious. This is, in many ways, its ultimate budget-saving trick. When confronted with crushingly bad budgetary restrictions, just give up entirely on looking like a serious or responsible show. Ideally, give up even trying to take yourself seriously. Instead, you embrace camp and black humor. It's a very standard technique, one of the classics of the avant-garde. The more subversive the material, the more innocuous the container you choose for it. To some extent this is what Hinchcliffe did, slipping horror into children's television where nobody was looking. But here we have it in a bigger form – cheap and silly children's television that doubles as anarchist agitprop. With a

dopey robot dog, just to make sure anybody who takes it seriously is getting the joke and not simply doing so by accident.

Obviously we're spinning a sow's ear into a purse to a ridiculous extent with this theory. But if there is a whiff of the implausible to this explanation, it's only because there's an air of desperation to this entire move, in many ways a frantic effort to find a way out of the mire the show seems to be sinking into over the course of this season. I mean, who would actually take the facts that the show has been offensively defanged and its budget entirely evaporated, and throw them back in the world's face while bellowing a subversive scream about anti-capitalist revolution? Who would be cynical and bitter enough to do that?

Well, Robert Holmes, obviously.

For all that we criticized him at the end of the previous book, he is unequivocally one of the greats. He's already invented two eras of Doctor Who and helped close out another. He was the creative vision of the show for its three best years thus far. And now, in his closing act as script editor, he finds a way forward for the show and reinvents it for a third time. And we're not even close to done with his story. He still has another one of the key stories in the Williams era to do (as well as *The Power of Kroll*), and then there's the whole second act to his tenure in the back half of Volume Six.

Nevertheless, this is the end to the glorious period of Doctor Who in which he had a hand in every single story. He's no longer one of the primary visionaries of Doctor Who, just a dear member of the creative supporting cast. So this is a fine and proper place to close our account of him and his wizardry.

Robert Holmes is one of the genuine wizards of Doctor Who – one who stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Whitaker and Troughton in terms of his contributions to the show's alchemy. The most earthly and mundane of the show's wizards, yes, but as anyone who has spent any time with the logic of mysticism knows, there is a peculiar sacredness to the mundane and the earthly. As Holmes himself showed us, the secret of alchemy is material social progress. There are more elaborately esoteric metaphors for those who want them, but the point stands. There is much to be said for a mundane wizard.

For all that Holmes gets praise for his mundane and small-scale pieces – things like this and *Carnival of Monsters* – he's equally adept at the epic, having done *The Deadly Assassin* and *Pyramids of Mars*. To treat him purely as a chronicler of the small scale is fundamentally untrue. What is true, however, is that he has no investment in the idea that the human scale and the epic scale are in some sense opposed. His epics are generally still based on the machinations and failings of mundane characters. *The Ark in Space* is perhaps the grandest example of this – a sweeping epic about the survival of humanity done as a claustrophobic character piece. And, of course, this is also the man who reinvented the Time Lords as squabbling old men bound by history. In many ways the heart of his genius is his ability to craft a small-scale epic – to craft an alchemy of the mundane.

Most accounts of Holmes pay considerable attention to his pre-television

career, which included being Britain's youngest commissioned officer in World War II (where he was stationed in Burma, giving context to the Matrix sequence of *The Deadly Assassin*), a stint as a police officer, and some time as a journalist. The usual explanation is that this gave him a sense of the world – as if, say, Terrance Dicks's time in the National Service and the advertising industry or Barry Letts's time in the navy and in the world of theater somehow left them oblivious to it. No, the easiest explanation for Holmes's sense of characterization and humanity is not his pre-writing career but the fact that he's a keen observer of human behavior. Or, to put it another way, he's just a damn good writer.

But there is something to be gleaned from his career history – just not the thing that anyone talks about. Even I have been pretty harsh on Holmes for excessive cynicism. But look at the jobs he's held. Even if we ignore the military stint on the grounds that anyone his age at that time would have fought in the war, his police career is clearly a form of public service. His journalism career, though not strictly speaking public service, is still a job with a clear commitment to the public good – a desire to improve the world and do good things. And while television writing is not quite so obviously based on public service, even a cursory glance at Holmes's self-deprecating descriptions of himself will show that he is not seeking glory. He has a piece in Peter Haining's *The Doctor Who File* in which he is relentlessly (and hilariously) dismissive of the idea that his writing is anything special.

Why, then, be a writer? Complete nihilism is difficult at best for a writer. Writing is such a solitary and extended process as to be nearly impossible without some belief that the result is going to have some impact. There's something fundamentally utopian about the naive and fruitless belief that banging away at the keys can possibly be worthwhile. Holmes may have been a black-hearted cynic, but there is, in his writing, a nagging sense that he does actually care about making the world a better place.

What's fascinating about Holmes, though, is that for him this doesn't manifest as an investment in broad master narratives or structures of power that can do good. His view of social progress is miles from Malcolm Hulke's belief that if only the science vicars took over we'd all be fine, or Terrance Dicks's belief that good traditional British values will always triumph. He has a belief in the public good that is tempered with a worldly experience of its pettiness and its banal evils. His view is one of righteous anger. He may never display anything that even faintly resembles a commitment to justice, but nobody else in the first twenty years of the series' history can touch him when it comes to demonstrating the horrors of injustice.

His eye is still imperfect, yes, leading to the frustrating bigotry of *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*and, and to a lesser extent *The Time Warrior*. And he has other blind spots. This story is yet another example of his fascination with disfigured or misshapen villains – a common enough trope in which villainy is externally represented, but one that ends up creating an uncomfortable equivalence between disability and malfeasance. It's a small point, but it's the sort of one that

never occurs to Holmes, who has almost no interest in or understanding of cultural difference beyond those of class politics. (However, if you're going to pick one axis of social justice to work on, you could do worse.) But this story is also a bracing reminder of how good he is when he does get his teeth into something that outrages him. And when it comes to outrage, as they say, Holmes is very well-balanced: he's got a chip on both shoulders.

There are not a lot of ways in which Robert Holmes and David Whitaker are similar writers, but in this regard they're deeply compatible. Whitaker made the Doctor into a mercurial alchemical figure. Mercury, alchemically speaking, has several traits: communication, speed, cleverness, traveling, etc. And the Doctor is compatible with basically all of them. But the biggest one is that mercury is changing. Mercury is eternally in flux. Mercury is anarchic.

And this captures Robert Holmes to a tee. As has been pointed out by many, this is a writer whose first story, way back in 1969, was about the Doctor mixing up acid to overthrow a repressive educational regime. He has always favored stories in which the old order is torn down. Change is always a destructive process. And Holmes's furious anger at the degradations of the world, which animates his best work, fuels a brilliant desire to just burn it all down. Once again Doctor Who shifts in step with the more anarchic subcultures, moving in beautiful sync with punk, which just had its mainstream validation four months previously as the Sex Pistols made their one and only *Top of the Pops* appearance.

The Sun Makers is fundamentally allied with the aesthetic and affective principles of punk. It is allied with a raging and working-class anger channeled through the avant-garde aesthetics and philosophies of the Situationists. It's a righteous fury dressed too ridiculously to take seriously, but tossing a Molotov cocktail all the same. Here at last we get a successor to Patrick Troughton's turn as a psychedelic anarchist: Tom Baker's turn as a punk, or perhaps post-punk anarchist. (Post-punk, it is worth noting, originated almost simultaneously with punk itself – just a few months after the Sex Pistols' *Top of the Pops* appearance, and around the same time as this story aired, Siouxsie and the Banshees were being referred to as post-punk in *Sounds*.)

So would Robert Holmes have come up with the idea to use the shoddiness of the show to disguise the sheer anarchic nature of its content? Yes. I believe he absolutely would have, and I believe he did. I believe this to be a conscious decision every bit as much as David Whitaker's alchemical themes were conscious and Patrick Troughton's acting style was conscious. This is Robert Holmes, punk sympathizer, dressing up Doctor Who in innocent clothing with full faith that the audience will catch the joke. And to his credit, plenty did, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Is it ideal? No. It's tough to argue seriously that it wouldn't have been nicer to stay in the many styles of subversive postmodernism that involve high production values. The sort of open and unapologetic shoddiness of this approach – this refusal to take itself seriously at all – is problematic. This is a

valiant bit of battling from the opposition, but only a year ago the series had been imperious and seemingly untouchable. Now things have begun to darken. The show's values are going to be in the opposition for a long and ugly stretch soon. We can't be mad at the show for making the best out of a very bad hand.

Yet for all of that, this is the starting gun on the parts of the Graham Williams era that people truly love, and rightly so. It's the flowers in the dustbin. It's the poison in the machine. There's a future after all. Once more, when England's dreaming, she's dreaming of the Doctor.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*Star Wars*)

I never drank the Kool-Aid here. I mean, *Star Wars* was fine. I enjoyed the movies when I watched them in third grade or so. But the "or so" when compared to my almost month-perfect recollection of watching *Planet of the Spiders* shows pretty clearly the extent to which I didn't fall down this rabbit hole. I attentively rented the entire trilogy from my local grocery store (ah, the '90s), if only to finally suss out the difference between it and *Star Trek*, watched them, and was later very puzzled by the existence of people who fanatically loved them as opposed to, as I had, basically enjoyed them. I still find them terribly overrated, and the continual grating of my ambivalence against the many people who absolutely love *Star Wars* has pretty much worn me down to active dislike of the franchise.

Still, regardless of my feelings, there's no arguing with the film's historical importance. There is a clear line that can be drawn across the history of science fiction, splitting it into "before *Star Wars*" and "after *Star Wars*." (Doubly so if the science fiction is in a visual medium.) So for Doctor Who, there's a huge difference in how *The Sun Makers*, the last story to air before *Star Wars* opened in the UK, was watched, and how the next story, *Underworld*, the first to air after it, was watched. And we can't not talk about it.

But knowing that *Star Wars* was transformative is not equivalent to understanding why. Let's first set aside the question of innovation. Whether or not *Star Wars* was, in fact, innovative in terms of what it does with science fiction (I don't think it particularly was), there's really no way to argue that *Star Wars* didn't mark a huge turning point in how science fiction was seen by the broader culture. It's clearly not that *Star Wars* marked when science fiction broke into the mainstream – there are far too many successful sci-fi movies from previous decades to take that claim seriously. But *Star Wars* is the tipping point in a transition between two modes of science fiction: one based on exploring science, the other a particular flavor of adventure fiction. And for those who've been keeping track, that means that *Star Wars* is, in the broader culture, the point where Doctor Who's view of science fiction becomes the dominant one.

Some history: the question of what the first piece of science fiction was is one with a wealth of possible answers, but the point where science fiction emerged as a distinct genre is rather easier to pin down – it happened in 1926 when Hugo Gernsback created *Amazing Stories*, the first pulp to be devoted entirely to science fiction. The first thing we should note about this is that science fiction in its original form did not exist in its "hard" manifestation. When science fiction became a genre (at which point various things before 1926 could be identified as early examples of the genre) it was specifically coming out of

pulp adventure.

So even as "hard SF" developed, it always existed alongside stories in which the science fiction elements were simply genre trappings. In a lot of ways, the pulp genres were somewhat interchangeable. Consider, for instance, the fact that H.P. Lovecraft's stories could often be placed in a science fiction mode, and Robert E. Howard was able to use many of Lovecraft's ideas just as well in sword-and-sorcery-style fantasy stories.

On the other hand, when science fiction began to be taken seriously – in its so-called "golden age" in the 1940s and '50s – it was largely in what we now recognize as the "hard SF" mode. This is the era where definitions of science fiction like Theodore Sturgeon's were formulated: "A human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its speculative scientific content," for instance. These were also the days of writers like Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, whose stories often resembled logic puzzles more than actual narratives.

I don't mean that as a criticism, to be clear. Science fiction rose to its golden age in the aftermath of World War II, a war that ended with a tremendous and dangerous feat of science. In its aftermath the world took a deep breath and realized that science had both saved it and risked causing its destruction. This was then followed by an explosion of consumer-focused science as home appliances and television became common. This was the era in which the image of the scientist-as-ultimate-authority came up – an era characterized by things like Vannevar Bush's "As We May Think", an essay that appeared in *Life* magazine almost immediately after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Bush himself played an instrumental role in the Manhattan Project) which called for the creation of something resembling Wikipedia, and other bits of popular science prognostication.

Given that context, a genre about thinking through the consequences of science made perfect sense. Golden age-style science fiction was a genre that responded directly to the concerns of its era, which explains a lot of why it marked the point where science fiction began to acquire some legitimate literary cachet. It also helped cement science fiction as a genre – for the first time, it wasn't just a subset of pulp adventure but a genre that could do things nothing else could. It's fairly easy to imagine how to rewrite "The Call of Cthulhu" to be a fantasy story. That's manifestly not true of any of the stories in, say, *I, Robot*.

But it's also important to note that this SF approach to science fiction was never the only game in town. The 1950s were full of stuff that was still basically pulp adventure with spaceships. The science fiction that could properly be called a genre independent of all others was still a subset of the larger body of science fiction. The high-water mark of the SF approach, culturally speaking, was *Star Trek* – a mainstream television show that was firmly and unabashedly science fiction in the golden age style.

The problem with the SF approach is that it was very much a product of its times. That's not to say it's irrelevant – stuff like the remake of *Battlestar Galactica*

or Duncan Jones's fantastic film *Moon* are genuinely good recent examples of SF. But once the giddy optimism of the space race gave way to the skepticism of things like *Doomwatch* there was no way for SF to remain the dominant mode of science fiction. SF was based on the idea that science was going to be the future. Once widespread trust of scientists crumbled to a more skeptical position, the "let's figure out how technology will shape the future" approach lost much of its appeal. Simply put, SF requires belief in the existence of the future. Once that belief is gone, SF can't really function and becomes a fairly marginal genre.

As a result, science fiction slowly moved away from being an independent genre and back towards being one of several adventure genres. And that's the context that *Star Wars* must be understood in. Because while science fiction had been off being its own genre, another one of the pulp genres had been busy having a remake of its own.

The key year here is 1954, when J.R.R. Tolkien published *The Lord of the Rings* and created fantasy as a genre. *The Lord of the Rings* is a much simpler story than people give it credit for. The heart of the story consists of Tolkien taking a smattering of Norse myths – most notably the story of Sigurd – and changing all the names (and, usually, not even very much). Again, this is not a criticism – Tolkien had a brilliant idea here. Myths – Norse and otherwise – are popular and beloved for wholly sensible and obvious reasons. But there's only a finite number of them. The obvious solution, then, is to start telling myth-like stories severed from their contexts. Which is what Tolkien figured out how to do: create a mythology that didn't actually belong straightforwardly to any given culture.

Now, then, we get to George Lucas's big idea. Lucas figured that if science fiction was going to revert back to being one of many more-or-less interchangeable styles, then it could be merged with fantasy. In other words, Lucas figured out that you could do fantasy-style myth-making with the trappings of high technology instead of the trappings of high fantasy. Hence *Star Wars*, which is essentially a fantasy story in terms of its plot structure and view of the world, but which is set in a world of spaceships and robots instead of in a world with dragons and elves.

Often this move on Lucas's part is described in terms of the specific source he used for his myths: Joseph Campbell's idea of the hero's journey. But describing what Lucas did that way requires an unfortunate thing that I generally take pains to avoid, namely taking Joseph Campbell remotely seriously. Still, we were going to have to deal with him some time, so.

The thing about Joseph Campbell that should immediately make you enormously suspicious is that he claims to have identified a fundamental structure to mythology and heroism that establishes a universal vision of human greatness. This is just too sweeping a claim to possibly be true. But that's not actually the biggest problem. The problem is how cack-handed his approach to it is. He provides an appallingly Eurocentric view of mythology that manages to argue that all Eastern mythology is descended from Egyptian mythology and that culture flows primarily west-to-east. On top of that, his view of the hero is

absurdly patriarchal. Given that he believes in a fundamental structure in human consciousness that creates the monomyth and that the monomyth is overtly male dominated, the necessary conclusion of Campbell's thought is that western patriarchy is a fundamental structure in human consciousness, to which I say, in my sincere, reasoned, and responsible critical opinion, that Joseph Campbell can go fuck himself.

No, Campbell is a crank. A well-read crank, but a crank nevertheless. Basically, he identified one story he liked about death and resurrection and proceeded to find every instance of it he could in world mythology. Having discovered a vast expanse of nails for his newfound hammer he declared that it was a fundamental aspect of human existence, ignoring the fact that there were a thousand other "fundamental stories" that you could find in world mythology and that he'd twisted large amounts of world culture badly out of shape in order to suit his pre-selected conclusion. The stuff that Miles and Wood suggested *Image of the Fendahl* was demonstrating the absurdity of? That's Campbell. He has zero credibility in any of the actual academic fields his "research" intersects with. He's pseudo-humanities. Which is an impressive feat, and I'm not sure I can actually think of anyone else who qualifies as that. He is Time Cube Man with a Bill Moyers special.

That said, the story he identified does work. It's not a transcendent and fundamental aspect of human experience, but it's a pretty good story, and George Lucas was savvy to nick it for the plot of *Star Wars*. Unfortunately, because Campbell was a lunatic blowhard who claimed that he'd identified a fundamental aspect of human existence, once Lucas showed that it also made money it became the mandatory structure of any piece of science fiction or fantasy made in Hollywood. I mean, unfortunately, this was the real legacy of *Star Wars*. Hollywood got suckered by a literary crank and came to believe that there's only one way to do a large number of movies. And so we continue to get a formulaic structure applied to all manner of things as though it's the only story in the world. When, in fact, it's frankly gotten boring.

There. I said it. The hero's journey has gotten boring. There should be an outright moratorium on the hero's journey across all narrative forms for at least a decade. The world would be a better place for it. But if we're being honest and fair, and we do try to be, this is incidental. Even if Lucas did fall for Joseph Campbell's quackery, he wasn't trying to convert Hollywood to the cult.

But once you understand that *Star Wars* is more broadly about wedding mythic structures to science fiction iconography you realize that it's not terribly original at all, what with Doctor Who having been doing it since 1963 (as *100,000 BC* was, at its heart, about ur-myths). And this is not to particularly privilege Doctor Who. Scads of science fiction was doing this stuff. It's just that nobody had done it with quite the monomaniacal zeal of George Lucas, nor with his skill as a director (which is not inconsiderable – certainly well beyond the skills of anyone else who was directing sci-fi movies in 1977).

But once this switches to being the dominant paradigm of science fiction, it

has some interesting effects for everyone else – ones that go beyond the clichés about effects or mythic structures or cute robots. Because it means that science fiction is viewed in a way that is much, much less focused on actual science and much more focused on storytelling, which had, in the golden age, very often played second fiddle to being clever with playground physics.

In effect, from this point on science fiction is less a genre defined by plot or ideas and more a pile of images that feel science-fictiony. And when you put those images into a story it becomes science fiction. This is not in and of itself a new idea, obviously, but even today you can find plenty of people who would cry foul at it. Because one of the things that this distinction splits people on is the nature of "believability" or "world-building" or (one of my least-favorite terms ever) "suspension of disbelief." So heck, having pissed off a raft of people by hating *Star Wars* and then another raft of them by hating Joseph Campbell, let's just go for the triple crown and take this down, too.

There's a default mode in which people think stories work. In it, the reader (or whatever the appropriate noun for "consumer of the story" is in a given case) pretends that the work of fiction is really happening so as to respond to it. Related to this is the concept of "secondary belief," articulated by Tolkien, in which the work of fiction is treated as if it presents a vision of a world that happens to not be real. In all of these views the problem with something that appears contradictory or that doesn't make sense within a narrative is that it breaks the "realism" of the story and shatters the reader's immersion.

This is, simply put, wrong. It is not how stories work at all. To paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, novels are not gossip about imaginary people. They are not descriptions of people who just happen not to exist. Rather, they're imitations, as Aristotle put it. Fiction has impact because it resembles the real world in some fashion and thus inherits some of its emotional affect. We care about things in fiction because they remind us of things that are real. And we read fiction through a process of continual interpretation and deciphering. Aristotle describes a plot as a web of events that make each other likely or necessary. Much of reading a work of fiction is working out that web – trying to figure out what the future implications of something are, or trying to work out why something happened based on what happened previously. (Indeed, this understanding of how reading works, as this parenthetical example shows by steadily approaching its conclusion so as to give you time to anticipate what it is, even on the sentence level.)

Understood this way, the problem with contradictions is that they are likely to be points in which the reader is led to make incorrect interpretive decisions for reasons having nothing to do with misdirection or surprise. To mention Doctor Who for a moment, the problem with having the Doctor pull a gun on someone and shoot them in cold blood is not that it's not believable. If that were to happen, the problem would not be that the audience would in some sense disbelieve what happened on the screen; they would not deny the fact that the Doctor shot someone. Instead they would be pissed off because everything

about Doctor Who up to this point has told us that we shouldn't ever expect the Doctor to do something like that. And so if it happened, viewers would immediately want to know what caused the Doctor to change so drastically, and if that were not provided, they would rightly reject the story. And the reason they'd be right to reject it is that the story wouldn't be interpretable – there'd be no way to coherently track the viewer's expectations and assumptions as the story goes on.

The point of this digression is to clarify a consequence of treating a genre as an aesthetic. If a genre like science fiction is an aesthetic and not a narrative structure then the nature of what has to be explained in a science fiction story changes dramatically. In an aesthetic, elements can be combined purely because they are the sorts of things that go together. If you have a spaceship, you can put robots on it without having to explain how the robots work or what role they play in the operation of the spaceship, simply because robots are the sorts of things that go on a spaceship. What this means is that things don't have to make sense. You don't actually need a coherent account of the technology or history of your science fiction "world." You just need to be able to tell a story that people can adequately anticipate and interpret.

And furthermore, you can have more than one kind of "aesthetic logic" going on at once. *Star Wars* works simultaneously along the Buck Rogers space-action set of expectations and along the Tolkien-style fantasy expectations. Because the Buck Rogers style of stuff is really just a haze of events and style anyway, this was an easy merge, but the fact that it was done so smoothly and in such a high-profile fashion did shove the baseline assumptions of science fiction and of genre-based writing in general to a new default position. The crossing of genres and the use of multiple concurrent narrative logics is going to become standard operating procedure starting from now. Again, of course, this is a switch that Doctor Who was ahead of the curve on.

But there were other switches *Star Wars* brought that Doctor Who was less ahead of the curve on. Obviously one of the big ones is special effects – the BBC was never going to match Lucas's budget. Doctor Who couldn't come close to *Star Wars* in its skill at depicting action sequences, though those are hardly new waters for Doctor Who to be navigating. And, of course, Doctor Who was mercifully behind the curve on all that hero's journey nonsense, largely managing to avoid that crap until 1996.

Unfortunately, those are all the consequences of *Star Wars* that everybody noticed at the time, leaving Doctor Who in an odd position. In the short term, it just became profoundly uncool, and the show is going to take a slow and painful beating because of it. In the longer term, though, the shift of *Star Wars* towards a more story-based and postmodern (in the sense of combining multiple contexts and logics in one work) mode of science fiction also marks the point where the ideas Doctor Who has been using for fourteen years now suddenly take over the world. They just don't bring Doctor Who with them. Yet.

Playing Pat-a-Cake with the Wall (*Underworld*)

It's January 7, 1978. Wings remain at number one with "Mull of Kintyre," and, as mentioned, stay there for the whole story. Bonnie Tyler, Donna Summer and the Bee Gees also chart. So that's not entirely exciting.

Since Doctor Who went on its Christmas break, the Copyright Act of 1976 took effect in the United States, changing American copyright law to be based on the life of the author instead of the date of publication. A referendum in Chile supported Augusto Pinochet's policies, which is a less impressive electoral feat than it sounds given Pinochet's overt fondness for the mass slaughter of his political opponents. And the United States returned the Holy Crown of Hungary to Hungary, having kept it safe in Fort Knox since World War II.

During this story, riots erupt in Nicaragua after the assassination of a leading critic of the government. Rose Dugdale and Eddie Gallagher become the first people to marry in prison in the Republic of Ireland. And speaking of Ireland, the European Court of Human Rights acquits the United Kingdom of torturing prisoners in Northern Ireland, but finds that they nonetheless mistreated them.

While on television, it's one of the great punching bags of Doctor Who: *Underworld*. I try, in *TARDIS Eruditorum*, to engage in redemptive readings, and, when that's not possible, at least to find interesting and unusual things to say about a story. But *Underworld* defies this, committing the twin sins of being both lousy and boring. It is infamously crap – so much so that even the basic trick of angrily slagging it off isn't going to be that interesting. This is the one Tom Baker story to slot in the bottom ten on the *Doctor Who Magazine's* 50th Anniversary poll. Lawrence Miles declares it the worst story of the 1970s. It's crap. It's garbage. Insulting it only adds to an already massive choir.

And yet it's not even the worst Baker and Martin script of Season Fifteen, little yet the worst Doctor Who story of the 1970s. (That's *The Monster of Peladon*.) For the most part, on this story at least, Tat Wood's review in *About Time* is spot on: there's nothing bad you can say about this that can't also be said about *The Time Monster*, and unlike *The Time Monster* there are at least some valid production reasons for why their backs were so up against the wall.

Star Wars was a mixed blessing for Doctor Who. This is an altogether more positive interpretation than most people would give you. The more common view has it that *Star Wars* was a disaster for Doctor Who because Doctor Who could never hope to match its effects and so looked cheap and silly after *Star Wars*. This, at least, is clearly nonsense – Doctor Who was looking cheap and silly just fine on its own not two stories ago.

All of which said... *Underworld* is horrendously cheap and silly. Amusingly,

one aspect of the story manages to be appallingly cheap-looking while simultaneously serving as a road map for future stories, which is the CSO work (CSO – short for Colour Separation Overlay – was an early form of blue-screen. Or green-screen, for Doctor Who, so as not to clash with the TARDIS). Nobody, not even Barry Letts, has managed to cross the line of what 1970s CSO technology was capable of to quite this gratuitous an extent. There are, of course, reasons this happened. Graham Williams was well aware that *Star Wars* was going to be out before this story aired and that the inevitable comparisons were not going to go well for his show. Accordingly, he decided to redo the script so as to require only two sets so that he could make sure both of them would be reasonably nice: a spaceship set, and a cavern set.

Unfortunately, upon returning from vacation he discovered that *Underworld* was on track for an overspend to the tune of three times its allotted budget. With the Minyan spaceship set already in production, he was faced with the option of pulling the plug on the final story of the season (which was tempting, as the intended finale was turning out to be completely unfilmable) or of getting exceedingly creative. The latter option was chosen, in part because abandoning episodes was going to be a disaster in its own right, and in part because they had an idea, which was to build models for the cavern sets and shoot them with CSO. This idea was appealing in particular because it would finally give Williams reason to force through a production decision (the first major change to how stories were made since Barry Letts) that he'd been lobbying for all season: an extra shooting day devoted entirely to effects work.

The only problem is that it didn't work. I mean, the effects-only day was a winner – it was just the effects themselves. The CSO ended up being the most spectacularly ill-advised attempt to beat *Star Wars* at its own game until at least *Galactica 1980*. Particularly great are any of the moments in which K-9, with motors running at an appallingly high volume, rolls through walls, although the sequence of the Trogs running around in a rockfall at the start of the second episode manages to capture the visual aesthetic of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* with an uncanny accuracy sullied only by the fact that it's not supposed to be funny.

But let's face it, the whole production is cheap looking even by the recent standards of Doctor Who. Perhaps the most telling moment is when K-9 is hooked up to the Minyan computer via what is very obviously a pair of binder clips and some telephone wire. What's striking about this isn't the use of cheap and everyday materials in Doctor Who – that's been going on for ages, with condom maggots and bubble wrap alien arms being unabashedly used in stories that are generally agreed to be classics. It's the fact that no effort whatsoever is made to disguise the telephone wire and binder clips. They're not spray-painted gold or anything. They're presumably not supposed to be telephone wire and binder clips, but it's impossible to look at them and see anything else. It's a stunning moment in which it's clear that the production department has simply given up all hope that this will ever look good.

Unfortunately, the visual effects aren't the only bad thing in this story. I mentioned the terrible rockfall scene at the start of the second episode, which is one of the single worst shots in all of Doctor Who. But its low quality is as much the fault of the actors playing the Trogs, whose style of running from rockfalls more resembles rushing to the bathroom than fleeing for one's life, as it is the bad CSO cave they're running through. And they don't even manage to occupy all the slots for "worst actors," with the Minyans and, for that matter, almost every other guest star flopping badly. This is somewhat more surprising. Even granting that this is Norman Stewart's first directorial effort, it is difficult to understand how so much went wrong in terms of casting.

That said, there's a general problem with the series' acting that starts to set in around now, and it's one that's worth understanding as a general case instead of as a lengthy series of specific bad performances. To some extent it's easiest to go back and look at this in terms of the previous Baker and Martin story and the appallingly bad performance of Frederick Jaeger as Professor Marius. The thing about that performance is that Jaeger is a good actor. He's even been good on Doctor Who, having played Professor Sorenson in *Planet of Evil*and Jano way back in *The Savages*. And yet he was unwatchably bad in *The Invisible Enemy*. What about that story would make someone we know to be a good actor to be that bad?

There's a viewpoint you can find from a sizable number of writers. Douglas Adams has a version of it he said about *City of Death*, for instance, and Steven Moffat has said it about *Coupling*. Usually the viewpoint comes in some form of telling actors who are appearing in something that's very funny to stop being so funny. In Moffat's telling, the single most common direction given to actors appearing in *Coupling* was, "You know that funny thing you're doing? Stop doing it." In Adams's version, it was frequently necessary to pull actors aside and tell them not to do funny walks or funny voices but to play it straight.

In a way this is just a version of taking your bubble wrap seriously, but not entirely. It's not as though Frederick Jaeger's acting changed particularly in *The Invisible Enemy* when he was face-to-face with a poor effect. Instead, this is a point about overall aesthetics. When the show is forced to look cheap and silly, a large number of actors instinctively respond by hamming up their performances. The logic behind it is sensible enough: given that the show isn't serious, clearly one should act non-seriously as well. So everyone slips into panto mode. The only problem is that it completely sandbags the approach that worked in *The Sun Makers*. *The Sun Makers* worked because the story was in on its own joke – it knew it was ridiculous, and that freed it up to be serious. But that only works if the story is a mix of the serious and the ridiculous. If everybody is in on the joke and openly acknowledges that everything is ridiculous then there's no joke anymore. The approach works only when the show gains the ability to turn on a dime between serious and ridiculous, and this requires a delicate balancing of both.Unfortunately, in this story, everyone is in on the joke.

To be fair, at this point we should probably return to the old joke about the

guy who came upon an old man playing checkers with his dog. The guy watched the two of them for a while, and finally said, "You know, this is incredible. You trained your dog to play checkers. I mean, that's got to be the smartest dog I've ever seen." And the old man shrugged and said, "Nah. He only wins about forty percent of the time." Yes, the BBC is unable to make it look good when they turn out six film-length science fiction stories a year on a BBC television budget without relying on standing sets or even on a sizable regular cast. But unless you're willing to say that the BBC shouldn't be doing science fiction in the first place, it's tough to complain too much about this. The impressive thing is that the BBC can do six film-length sci-fi stories a year at all, regardless of how good they look. And reasonable people, at least, understood this in 1978 and were willing to accept that Doctor Who wasn't supposed to be *Star Wars*. Which is fine. The problem is that, with this story at least, they seem to have forgotten that.

This isn't just a statement about the effects, either. *Underworld*, although written and shot before *Star Wars*, is very much occupying the same conceptual territory. The plot of this story is basically the myth of Jason and the Argonauts retold with sci-fi concepts. So, it's myth redone as science fiction, i.e., the thing that everyone acts like *Star Wars* was so clever for figuring out. On the one hand, this allows us to cheekily suggest that George Lucas is almost as clever and as good at writing as Bob Baker and David Martin. But on the other, it suggests that Doctor Who, in attempting an effects-heavy mythological epic, is not exactly playing to its low-budget strengths.

And much as *Star Wars* isn't original in this regard, it is at least very competent. It does not, for instance, have an irritating coda in which it pats itself on the back for how clever it is to reference Greek myths. And perhaps more to the point, it's not like this is the first retelling Doctor Who has done lately. It retold *Quatermass and the Pit* two stories ago, and in recent memory it's done *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Frankenstein*, various mummy movies, and was going to open the season with a redo of *Dracula* until that got scuppered because the BBC was doing a serious adaptation of *Dracula*, which led Terrance Dicks to hurriedly write *Horror of Fang Rock* instead. In this regard there's not actually anything all that new in using *Jason and the Argonauts* other than the fact that the underlying premise is no longer innovative so much as it's trendy.

On the other hand, as formulaic structures go, "take the Doctor and shove him into someone else's story" isn't a bad one. There are, after all, rather a lot of other stories, and the Doctor's anarchic tendencies contrast well with most of them. Even in this story, hidden behind the bad effects, there's the Doctor's line about how "the more ritual and mumbo-jumbo, the greater the deterrent. That's the whole point of official sadism," which is one of the most cuttingly anti-authoritarian lines in the whole series.

The only problem (and even Tat Wood, who comes close to defending this story, ends up admitting to it) is that there's not actually a reason for this story to exist beyond the cleverness of its own existence. *Jason and the Argonauts* is not a

story with immense cultural relevance. There's not a lot of cutting or innovative commentary to be made on Britain of 1978 via *Jason and the Argonauts*. This is Doctor Who adapting existing literature with no real point behind it, just for the sake of doing it. And it's also doing a myth because myths are big, so it makes for more epic Doctor Who with no attention paid to whether there's a good story or a good set of images.

Which is the basic problem with Baker and Martin at this point, and something I've criticized them for previously. They're long on ideas and short on interest in developing them. In their early stories this worked because the production team stepped up and made uncanny and impressive visuals to go along with the ideas. *The Claws of Axos* was just the story of the Trojan Horse glammed up to the point of utter and spectacular brilliance; it worked because the visuals were so fun. Here the visuals are as bad as the show has ever managed, and suddenly the facile nature of Baker and Martin's ideas is revealed. As with *The Invisible Enemy*'s failure to do anything with cloning, *Underworld* fails spectacularly to do anything with the idea that the Time Lords were worshipped as gods by the Minyans. It's a great idea, even though it's only a slightly new spin on Chris Boucher's main good idea in *The Face of Evil.* But Baker and Martin just leave it there, blowing the biggest opportunity to do anything with this story. Similarly, the idea of the Minyans endlessly and torturously regenerating themselves isn't really touched. The villain is just another crazy computer, and that's not done as well as Boucher did it a year previously, either. Much like *The Invisible Enemy*, there's a good story to be written with these ideas, and this just isn't it.

But for all that this is yet another deeply frustrating Season Fifteen story, in the end the same explanation is in place. This season was made under particularly trying circumstances, with a lot of drastic creative changes. Everyone involved deserves more credit than they get for simply getting something to the screen. Ultimately, this is a particularly frustrating period of transition for the series; it's not quite fair to read much more into it.

Meanwhiles and Neverweres (*The Invasion of Time*)

It's February 4, 1978. "The Mull of Kintyre" has finally been unseated at the top of the charts by Althea and Donna's "Uptown Top Ranking," a nice little reggae number. It makes it a week before Brotherhood of Man unseats it with "Figaro," a song widely accused of ripping off ABBA, who, coincidentally, knock it off a week later with "Take a Chance on Me," which has a three-week run before Kate Bush storms to number one with "Wuthering Heights," which is, quite frankly, a fantastic song, doubly so for having been written in the space of a few hours by an eighteen-year-old, which is the sort of thing that makes those of us who are over thirty feel desperately old and like we have wasted our lives. This song is also worth pointing to on the grounds that the New Romanticism movement, which it is self-evidently an iconic text of, is generally dated as kicking off in 1979 at the earliest, which makes this a bewilderingly massive hit a good year or two before the movement that it obviously belongs to actually came into being. Bonnie Tyler, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Rod Stewart, Blondie, Electric Light Orchestra, and the Bee Gees also chart, the latter with "Stayin' Alive."

While in real news, Ian Smith, prime minister of Rhodesia, agrees to transfer power to black majority rule, attempting to end a saga that we've been following since *The Myth Makers*. Like almost everything else in that saga, it doesn't work. Electrical workers in Mexico City unexpectedly discover the Great Pyramid of Tenochtitlan in the middle of the city, which is the sort of thing that just doesn't happen in most of our lives. Larry Flynt is shot and paralyzed in the US, a hijacking of a bus on Israel's Coastal Highway by Palestinian terrorists leaves thirty-eight civilians dead, and China lifts a ban on works by Dickens, Aristotle, and Shakespeare.

While on television, and speaking of Shakespeare, we have one of the most overtly Shakespeare-inspired Doctor Who stories in the entire run, as the Doctor nicks Hamlet's whole "acting mad to confuse everyone" plan. The result does not alter the basic nature of Season Fifteen – it's a mixed bag that lands more on the side of not working than working. And, notably, this had begun to take its toll on the program. Under Hinchcliffe the program reliably got viewers in the ten to twelve million range. Under Williams, barring a massive ITV strike, the show was solidly in the seven to nine million range – still fine ratings, but a visible drop.

And while we've been staying positive about this season, let's be clear, it's not hard to understand why the viewers gave up. The entire aesthetic apparatus of the show imploded on short notice, the level of basic competence that could be expected in the production plummeted, and the artistic goals of almost every

story this season have not extended much beyond, "Oh God, let's just get this made." This story is no exception in that department – a recurrence of the industrial disputes that happened almost annually at the BBC and the fact that the original script had bottomed out spectacularly (by legend it was abandoned after it was found to require a night shoot in a stadium full of cats) meant that the replacement script was assembled under pressure and with lots of decisions being made for no reason other than that all the good decisions were already off the table for whatever reason.

But while Season Fifteen has felt like a drunken stumble in panicked pursuit of a viable aesthetic, that doesn't mean it hasn't managed to get closer to one. There has been a coherent move over the course of these last six stories from the baroquely postmodernist horror of the Hinchcliffe era to the more aggressively materialist postmodernism of satire and rebellion. It's been horrendously rough, and *The Invasion of Time* still shows plenty of the problems of this transition. First and foremost are, once again, the production values. This story has numerous moments that just look shoddy, the most infamous ones being the effect used for the Vardans, the bewilderingly sloppy TARDIS chase sequences of the final episode, and the fact that the pacing is appallingly off. But we've been doing this dualism for several essays now, and even if you're not bored of it, I certainly am. So instead of focusing on that, let's look both at the things within this story that do work (and there are several) and at the thing that is, in hindsight, its most problematic element.

First the good, which is something that can be praised about this story and, for what it's worth, the last one: this is unabashedly television that assumes that its viewers are intelligent people. This story goes further than any other to date in terms of the patience it demands of its audience. It's not that unusual to withhold key details about the premise until several episodes into a story. But it's tremendously unusual to do so in a format where we're left uncertain for two of the six episodes as to what the Doctor is doing or whose side he's on.

Typically in a Doctor Who story the audience's level of knowledge, while not equivalent to the Doctor's, is primarily related to his level of knowledge. We're not privy to his thought processes, but since he's the moral center of the series we do use him as our benchmark for how to evaluate other characters. The audience is, by default, assumed to make the same value judgments as the Doctor. We're supposed to like the same characters he likes and to dislike the same characters he dislikes. If he finds something morally appalling or worth destroying, we're expected to as well. Occasionally this is subverted – a character the Doctor initially appears to like turns out to be bad, or a character the Doctor has been dismissive of becomes good – but even there the Doctor remains the audience's main frame of reference for making sense of the rest of the story; the audience's opinion of the character typically shifts at the same time the Doctor's does.

But here, for nearly three episodes, that gets completely inverted. It's not, of course, that the Doctor actually appears to be the bad guy. Even if you don't

know the premise of the story going in, the Doctor is still the moral center of the story. Assuming he's gone bad is like assuming he's going to die as a result of the cliffhanger: clearly wrong. But just because the audience knows the Doctor is playing some sort of larger game doesn't mean the audience knows what game he's actually playing. From the audience's perspective all of the reference points are scrambled. The entire point of the story for its first third is that it doesn't actually make any sense.

As Miles and Wood frequently point out, the best cliffhangers are not those in which the suspense is derived from teasing the next event in the plot, but where a revelation changes the status quo and what that ultimately signifies– i.e., not "What's going to happen?" but "What does that mean?" A prime example comes in the best cliffhanger of the story, which is in no way the sudden appearance of the Sontarans in the fourth episode, but rather the Doctor cackling madly as he introduces the Time Lords' "new masters" at the end of the second episode. This is interesting not because of the possibility that the Doctor has broken bad, but because of the complete mystery as to what the heck he's doing: what could possibly have motivated the Doctor to act like this?

But what's really impressive about *The Invasion of Time* is that it sustains this approach over two and a half episodes. Until the Doctor's conversation with Borusa in the third episode, the audience is left in a continual cliffhanger-like state of trying to figure out the significance of what they're seeing. Far from, as Lawrence Miles bizarrely asserts, being the point where the show stops trying to take the viewer to interesting places, this is a phenomenally successful attempt to recapture that approach in a world where everybody knows the premises of the show and where the Doctor is a reassuring figure, as opposed to the cranky and potentially dangerous man he was when the show started. By throwing out the normal storytelling apparatus of the series – following the Doctor – this story gets the audience spending two and a half episodes trying to figure out its rules. The last time the program spent that long playing "What are the basic principles of this setting and this story?" it was in black and white.

There's a sophistication to this storytelling that's actually well beyond anything in the Hinchcliffe era, save for, arguably, *The Deadly Assassin*. This is a story that requires the viewer to pay attention, and that requires continual guessing and re-evaluating of guesses. It's cerebral and demanding. In many ways, this is the most triumphant rebuke of Mary Whitehouse to daPS: a story that depends almost entirely on the exact processes of interpretation she ignores. This is a story that depends on the fact the viewer is not simply treating it as a documentary about imaginary people but as something bound by a series of tropes, conventions, and narrative rules that are at least as important, if not moreso, than the events that actually happen on screen in terms of understanding the show.

This is all particularly powerful in the context of what Miles and Wood compellingly argue what this story is about. They point out that the sorts of events that take place in this story would have likely been associated with the rise

of African dictators like Idi Amin or, a year or so after this story, Robert Mugabe. By setting it on Gallifrey, a planet obviously inspired by Oxford and Cambridge, the story positions the sort of event that happens in areas far removed from the UK into the heart of British culture to considerable effect. By making the storytelling challenging and complex the viewer is forced to confront the chaos and ambiguity that surrounds a revolutionary coup and a its consequent change in power, and is compellingly reminded that not only could it "happen here" they'd be hard-pressed to keep up with it and notice it was happening in time to stop it.

The other very satisfying aspect of this story is the way in which it plays with the audience's understanding of Tom Baker's Doctor. By this point Baker, more than any other Doctor (including Pertwee's) is played to be beloved by the audience. There are a lot of parts to this: the fact that Baker's Doctor is overtly funny in a way none of his predecessors – not even Troughton – really was, for instance. But this propensity is also reflected in the show's basic visual grammar. Baker gets close-ups and a central position in the shot in ways his predecessors didn't, and he's had a considerably smaller supporting cast than any of them did. A fundamental aspect of how Doctor Who works in the Williams era is based on the assumption that watching Tom Baker is a fundamental part of the audience's pleasure.

In this regard, *The Invasion of Time* is genuinely radical, in that it takes a central pleasure of the show and twists it into an unsettling and incomprehensible form. In a show about the pleasure of watching Tom Baker, making it so that we cannot understand what Tom Baker is doing is a brave and fascinating move. Because we like to watch Baker so much, it becomes deeply unsettling to watch him pretending to be the bad guy. Baker is the only Doctor thus far who could work in this story simply because he's the only one charismatic enough to make it disturbing in this way. It is worth comparing this to Troughton, who consciously makes the Doctor unnerving at times. But when Troughton does it, the sense that something is wrong comes from the fact that his character is mercurial enough that it's ever so slightly plausible he's doing something bad. That was, in fact, how his character was introduced. Yes, we know the Doctor won't turn out to be evil, but with Troughton we're never completely confident that he'll turn out to be good either.

Baker, on the other hand, we love and trust, so watching him pretending to be a villain for an extended stretch unsettles us in strange new ways. And Baker plays it fantastically, delivering an unequivocal reminder that, whatever problems his increasing ego caused the production, he was at least partially justified in his egotism simply because he really was very, very good. He plays the Doctor's madness in such a way as to keep him firmly the Doctor we love, but turning all of the things that are normally pleasurable about the Doctor into unsettling subversions of the character.

That said, the story has a massive flaw. Well, it has several, but in hindsight the biggest by far is its introduction of a very different relationship to the notion

of continuity than the series has ever displayed before. In some ways this is closely related to the story's primary strength. What's best about the story is the way in which it plays with people's expectations of what Doctor Who is. What's worst about it is the way in which it relies on the show's history in lieu of actually establishing any urgency or investment.

The telltale moment is when the Sontarans, who have not appeared in over three years and who aren't particularly A-list monsters, get trotted out for a "surprise reveal" cliffhanger. This cliffhanger, for all its supposed glory, is, in truth, an appalling moment. Its entire impact is based on the fact that the story had, mere moments earlier, appeared to be over. In truth the sudden appearance of the Sontarans is nothing more than a desperate story extender; having failed to find a way to get the Vardans to be worth six episodes, the writers had to add two episodes' worth of Sontaran runarounds, one of which is just a tedious chase sequence. And, of course, they just look bad. The moment most people cite is the one where a Sontaran trips over a chair and nearly falls into the swimming pool, but for my money the real great moment is when Stor dramatically puts his helmet back on and flagrantly fails to get the eye holes to line up with his eyes. Again, I'm not one to point out bad effects as a matter of course, but in this case it's particularly grating because the only thing the Sontarans have going for them here is that they're ostensibly big, major returning monsters. They're supposed to be epic, which means looking cheap and silly is a problem.

But more broadly, the use of the Sontarans has little to do with their merits as an alien species. Holmes had never even designed them as a species – Linx was a Master surrogate, not a "monster" as such. No, the reason they're being used is purely that there's a decent chance much of the audience will recognize them, thus adding excitement to what would otherwise be a cliffhanger that amounts to shouting, "Oh, hey, there's another two weeks of this!" The fact that the Sontarans are a relatively uninspiring race that are in no way what people want to see invading Gallifrey (the Daleks or the Cybermen would be the far more obvious choices) is, in this case, almost completely irrelevant.

This gets at the real problem in this story, however, which is the Time Lords. As I've previously said, this season takes a nail gun to the coffin of the Time Lords as an interesting and imposing race. Much of what Jan Vincent-Rudzki wrongly accused *The Deadly Assassin* of being describes this story perfectly: it marks the point where the Time Lords become hapless, incompetent dupes. When Paul Cornell brings back the Vardans in his novel *No Future*, he memorably has the Doctor mock them as the only race ever to be outwitted by the Sontarans. It's a great moment that gets at the silliness of using the Sontarans here, but underneath the joke is a rather spectacular missing of the point: the Time Lords are also outwitted by the Sonatarans in this story. Given how unimpressive the Sontarans are, this is, to say the least, a rather stark failing on their part.

But more broadly, this is when the Time Lords are finally treated as something it's perfectly ordinary to see. There is no sense of mystique or

occasion as we return to Gallifrey. It's nothing more than another recurring guest planet. Last time we went to Gallifrey it was an awe-inspiring event of such size that it ripped apart the Doctor and Sarah Jane. This time its magnitude comes only from its invocation of the series' past – the fact that something that was popular in the past has come back again. This, more than any of the changes to Time Lord society (and virtually every idea *The Invasion of Time* has is vastly inferior to what *The Deadly Assassin* seemed to hint at; in particular its conception of the Matrix is painfully dull, as the hallucinatory world built out of the minds of dead Time Lords becomes little more than a Presidential Wikipedia) is what finally kills off any sense of grandeur that the Time Lords might have had. The series does not ask us to care about them as anything more than a familiar set of funny costumes.

And if we may be permitted to peek ahead slightly, this approach will prove to be disastrous for the series in the long term. This is not the first time the series has simply assumed that because something has been seen before it will be cool to see it again without thinking that anything else is required. But the fact that this approach is now applied to Gallifrey and the Time Lords – to the subject that, for the first six years of Doctor Who, were an impregnable mystery – speaks volumes. It's the point where the underlying mythology of Doctor Who stops existing for its own value and starts existing purely for nostalgia. Which in turn represents a tacit admission that the series isn't as good as it used to be and thus that it is recycling past ideas not because they worked well but because they represent a yearning for an idyllic past.

The sad thing is that the series is finally starting to show that it's just as good as it always was and that it does have bold new ideas. Regrettably, the worst ideas of this story – especially making Gallifrey ordinary – will end up being the ones with the most impact. However, to fault this story for *The Arc of Infinity* would be like faulting *The Time Warrior* and *The Deadly Assassin* for this story. And if nothing else, this story, and for that matter Season Fifteen in general, deserves some credit. It was made under astonishingly trying conditions that rival those of the overworked start in inadequate studio conditions that characterized Season One. The fact that it often seemed satisfied just to get to the finish line and make it to the screen is unfortunate, but we shouldn't forget that just getting twenty-six episodes made at all this season was a challenge. To pull it off while also reinventing the show in response to considerable political pressure is a phenomenal result, even if that result is one of the hardest seasons to watch. But my God, it could have been so much worse. And next season, frankly, it gets much better.

This leaves us with one more obvious thing to talk about: Louise Jameson's departure. Some companions are easy to like. Leela, on the other hand, is easy to love. For all of the many very valid complaints about Leela, from the implicit racism of her conception to the tedious marginalization of the character in the latter episodes of this season, Louise Jameson consistently turned in one of the most impressive performances ever done with the companion role, displaying an

adaptability that rivaled that of Patrick Troughton in terms of the raw ability to find something dramatic to do in a given scene. There are companions who did better with good material than she did, but few if any who did as well with material as poor as she reliably made sublime. Her departure is in many ways a perfect summation of the character: rushed, poorly considered, badly upstaged by Tom Baker, and yet dignified for no reason other than the sublime skill of Louise Jameson. And though it's hard for the audience not to get pulled along with Baker's giddy grin as he stares at the camera in the final shot, the fact remains – if only for the actress – Leela is definitely a character who will be missed.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*Fawlty Towers* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*)

There is a strain of British popular culture – one perhaps more visible to Americans than it is in Britain itself – that is oddly focused on Cambridge. This is not in and of itself surprising, given the size and prestige of Cambridge as a university, but it's still worth remarking on the sheer quantity of Cambridge-educated people among the pool of British people that Americans like: Hugh Laurie, Stephen Fry, Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, John Cleese, Sacha Baron Cohen, John Oliver, and, most important for our purposes today, Douglas Adams. And those are just the ones who were members of the Footlights Club there. The list is practically a who's who of British comedians to have hit it big in the US. (Oxford's equivalent organization, on the other hand, has Michael Palin, Terry Jones, Rowan Atkinson, and Richard Curtis.)

The nature of this is worth discussing for two reasons. First, we're about to enter the two-year stretch of Doctor Who where Douglas Adams was a driving creative influence, and so we should probably square away what's going on with him. Second, however, we're entering the period where Doctor Who begins to get marketed aggressively in the United States. Although the first set of Tom Baker stories flogged here cuts off at *The Invasion of Time* and thus didn't have any Douglas Adams-penned material, the fact remains that Douglas Adams and Doctor Who broke out in the US more or less simultaneously.

Unlike *Star Wars*, there's not a ground zero in the transition to this outbreak of Anglophilia. It is, after all, a less talked-about moment of British influence in American culture than the British Invasion waves of music in the 1960s and 1980s, or even the 1980s wave of British comics creators. It's tough to point out exactly when what we may as well call the Cambridge Invasion took place. Indeed, 1978 is a bit of an odd year to run this, especially given that I want to stop off at *Fawlty Towers*, which aired in 1975 and 1979, and that the "Doctor Who in America" moment is still a year or two away. But I think there's a strong case to be made that Douglas Adams is the central figure in the Cambridge Invasion. Certainly it's worth noting that his time on Doctor Who and the creation of his best-known work coincided almost perfectly, and that Doctor Who cast a long shadow over his work, as his other series – the Dirk Gently novels – adapted two of his Doctor Who scripts into the first book. But despite all of that, let's start with *Fawlty Towers*. It unambiguously comes out of the same Cambridge circle as Douglas Adams, and is one of the most successful pieces of British comedy ever, but, notably, it's miles from the science-fiction end of the pool and thus works as a control experiment before the sci-fi geek stuff comes

in.

The first thing we should note about *Fawlty Towers*, obvious as it might be, is that it's a sitcom and not a sketch show. As straightforward a statement of fact as this is, it's worth remarking on simply because the key figure of *Fawlty Towers*, John Cleese, has *Monty Python* as his other major claim to fame. So the first thing we should do is distinguish it from that, if only because that's the last time we checked in with comedy. *Monty Python* was largely absurdist in its comedic approach. It was a show about the utter insanity of the world and the impossibility of finding sane people within it.

Superficially, *Fawlty Towers* appears to regress from that, back towards an older model of British comedy about sane people caught in outrageous situations as opposed to the *Monty Python* model in which everything and everyone is variably insane or sane. But it's not quite right to say that Basil is a sane man in an insane world. The plots of most episodes, in fact, involve slowly pushing Basil over the line into complete insanity. So really, *Fawlty Towers* is another step forward from *Monty Python*. Where *Monty Python* was about the ambiguous relationship between the sane and the insane, *Fawlty Towers* is about navigating the gap. On the one hand, Basil generally appears to be the sanest person at the start of every episode. Selfish and a bit myopic, certainly, but rational and with at least some understanding of the world. Then, as a series of generally outrageous mishaps caused largely but not exclusively by people who initially appear to be crazier than him, he's driven mad.

There's an aggressiveness to this approach that is lacking even in *Monty Python*. *Monty Python* may skewer the world for being insane, but there's a comedic version of "the personal is political" here that really should be mentioned. *Fawlty Towers* is about how the world drives a basically well-meaning man apoplectically insane. It's about the continual humiliation of a bumbling man who just wants to better his lot in life. And it's savage about it. It forces its audience to simultaneously cringe at and enjoy Basil's humiliation. But the main thing is its refocusing on the degradations of everyday life – the way in which the collapse into the vicious absurdism characteristic of British comedy takes place as a byproduct of day-to-day existence, and the humiliating ways in which that manifests.

Which brings us around to Douglas Adams. The centerpiece of his comedy, especially when it's at its best, is its capacity to depict the petty bureaucracy and stupidity of the world in a way that is both hilarious and nightmarish. This is the thing that everybody knows about him, and rightly so. Look at the first episode of *Hitchhiker's*, in which Arthur Dent is basically a Basil Fawlty-type character. This is worth stressing, because for almost the entirety of the *Hitchhiker's* series many of the jokes hinge on Arthur's confusion and bewilderment in the world, but in the first episode he's by miles the sanest character. We first meet him in a confrontation with Prosser, the man trying to demolish his house. Contrary to how almost everybody thinks of and remembers Arthur, however, it's Arthur who has the upper hand in the conversation,

running rings around Prosser and getting all of the good lines. It's only after that starting point is well established that Arthur gets led down the road of insanity, making his arc a dead ringer for that of Basil Fawlty in any given episode.

In one sense, then, Adams's success is dead simple – he applied his deft ability to describe the petty indignities of life to the science fiction milieu and hit it big with intelligent geeks. But the appeal of this viewpoint, frankly, isn't that it does a particularly good job of explaining Adams so much as it explains Adams with the barest minimum of acknowledgment that Adams was a really, really good writer. There are, admittedly, things that might make a reasonable person prefer to keep such acknowledgment to a minimum. As Adams got more successful, his already marginal relationship with deadlines grew more and more grotesque. In the 1980s he had five novels out, as well as two computer games, a television series, and the bulk of *Last Chance to See* (by far his best book). In the 1990s, on the other hand, he released exactly one book. This, however, was in some ways merciful given the degree to which his work slid slowly and inexorably into extreme and over-the-top cynicism – particularly in the latter books of the *Hitchhiker's* series, the last two of which make Robert Holmes look like a sunny optimist upon whom birds alight to sing their happy little songs.

But in far too many people these admittedly on-target criticisms have somehow grown into a general belief that Adams was a sloppy or undisciplined writer who lacked skill at plots and just wrote science fiction-themed comedy. This viewpoint is utterly mad and displays the telltale signs of willful contrarianism such as being appallingly wrong and based on nothing resembling actual evidence. The closest thing to an accurate version of the claim that I can even concoct is that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has a somewhat odd plot structure, which, while true, in no way means that the plot structure is messy or in any way dodgy.

In fact, the plot structure of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* makes total sense for what it's doing. It's just that one of the most bizarrely unasked questions in all of geek culture is, "Other than being funny, what is *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* doing?" Which is, if nothing else, the sort of question we tend to cover in *TARDIS Eruditorum*. So let's clear that up, shall we? And then perhaps we can explain why its plot structure is what it is, why Douglas Adams and his Cambridge ilk broke out so massively in the US when they did, and maybe make some cryptic comments that segue nicely into *The Ribos Operation*.

Let's start with what is the most obvious bit of structural elegance in *Hitchhiker's*, the way in which Prosser and the Vogons are in fact the exact same people and make the exact same statements, only on different scales. This is not subtle – both the Earth and Arthur's house are to be destroyed for a bypass, similar comments are made about the plans having been on display (albeit in an impossible-to-access manner), and, of course, both are callous bureaucrats working in the name of a hazily-at-best defined sense of progress. There's really not a lot of points on offer for failing to notice that they're similar.

But they are, which is, of course, the whole point of the series. Everything in the galaxy, in fact, is presented in familiar Earth tones. I don't mean this in the sense of "everything in the galaxy to some extent provides a commentary on Earth" – all science fiction accomplishes that. No, I mean that the actual terms in which everything is explained are Earth terms, even when the person doing the explaining is ostensibly the Guide itself, which we are told knows nothing about Earth beyond that it is (mostly) harmless. For instance, we are told that the book begins by claiming, "Space is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mindbogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist's, but that's just peanuts to Space." Now, again, to be perfectly clear, this is not meant as an editorial interjection by Adams. This is, diegetically, supposed to be the opening to the Guide itself. Which brings up a rather pressing question: why is the Guide talking about the chemist?

The answer is not, in this case, the obvious one: because the book was written by an Englishman and it's funny. There's actually a perfectly sensible explanation for this within the narrative – one that also explains the Prosser/Vogon parallels, and really, most of the story in general. If, as we are told, the Earth is a massive computer and that humans are in fact a complex data-processing unit constructed to understand the Universe, it shouldn't be anything resembling a surprise that the larger galactic culture is an odd reflection of Earth. In fact, it's pretty much implicit in the premise.

In which case, the structure makes perfect sense. The story is about turning the everyday mundanities of life into sci-fi concept pieces. So Adams uses one of the basic structures of science fiction: a series of captures and escapes chained together to get the protagonist and his friends from their starting point to the eventual resolution of everything. (And the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, at least in its original radio form, definitely has an ending. The sequels, as sequels do, muck it up, but the original radio series has a perfectly satisfying conclusion.) This structure is, of course, the structure of Doctor Who. Actually, more specific than that. Miles and Wood's observation that Adams had obviously watched *The Daleks' Masterplan,* because of the bits with the mice and the cricket green, doesn't go nearly far enough. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, from a plot perspective, is a Terry Nation story: captures and escapes that are punctuated by lengthy exposition sequences – typically from the eponymous Hitchhiker's Guide. But because the central concept of the book is the elevation of petty human idiocies to sci-fi concepts, instead of action sequences in which Doctor Beeblebrox and Tricia McForeman use schoolboy science to escape the Daleks, you get sketch comedy bits about poetry.

It is, in fact, an astonishingly elegant structure – do Terry Nation plotting written in the voice of a snarky travel guide to Britain disguised as a sci-fi story. Anyone who tells you that Douglas Adams's genius was only based on his use of language or his ability to tell a joke is just wrong. He had an incredible sense of pace and structure and could merge genres and do that postmodern jumping back and forth between them that we talked about just a few essays ago with

ostentatious ease. Given this, it's easy to see why both Neil Gaiman and Steven Moffat openly cite Adams as a major influence; both inherited this exact feature of his writing. It's what people who dislike them describe as them "showing off" – the moments where they execute a particularly multi-layered sequence in a way that feels just a little bit like they're doing it just to prove they can.

Those of us who adore all three writers point out that such "showing off" is actually really, really hard and that it's the sort of thing you *should* do if you can actually do it. I can assure you, as a writer, that most of us would sacrifice family members to bang out a transition as perfect as, "By a strange coincidence, 'None at all' is exactly how much suspicion the ape-descendant Arthur Dent had that one of his closest friends was not descended from an ape, but was, in fact, from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse." The sheer pluck of that sentence and its completely arbitrary swerve into a different genre is a thing of sheer beauty that sails right past its audience, gets them to do a double take, and by the time they've caught up with it the story is in a whole new place.

In these terms, the ending is a work of genius. Ford and Arthur, having teleported out of one crisis, arrive on a generation starship that actually turns out to consist of the irritating middle management – marketing consultants and, memorably, telephone sanitizers – who were exiled from their planet by the rest of their society. The Golgafrinchan Ark then crashes into the Earth and ends up causing the extinction of Earth's actual indigenous species; the Golgafrinchans become the dominant species and the ancestors of mankind, meaning that the entire experiment of using the Earth to divine the meaning of life was cocked up to begin with.

To some extent this renders the entirety of the *Hitchhiker's Guide* a shaggy dog story, which in some ways it is – just as the eventual revelation of the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything is unabashedly a shaggy dog story resulting in the book's best-known punchline: Forty-two. But it's altogether more complex than that. After all, one of the people repopulating the Earth is Arthur himself. This is firmly in what the current idiom calls "timey-wimey" territory, not the least because the basic concept of the Golgafrinchans is another instance of the cultural logic of the Earth getting applied to a galactic scale. The entire joke requires us to accept that the von Däniken-style ancient aliens not only have telephones but also telephone sanitizers.

In other words, the Golgafrinchans reveal the fundamental futility of the Earth's stated purpose in completely and totally understanding the universe, and yet they are an implicit confirmation of the basic legitimacy of that concept. For all that Arthur and Ford seem to have discovered that the experiment is doomed, the entire story up to and including its ending is continually confirming the legitimacy of the experiment by showing the ways in which the mundane insanities of human life are a microcosm for the entire galaxy.

This sort of tight, self-referential, recursive structure is a fundamental part of what people like about Douglas Adams's writing. In particular, what appeals is his ability to play out this structure in both big, thematic ways like those we've

just talked about and in smaller ways like the re-use of single lines or the surprise paying off of setups from episodes previous.

Again, this is the sort of thing that drives Adams's critics up a wall on the grounds that he's just being clever for its own sake. But as it happens, there is one group of people for whom this sort of thing had inordinate appeal, and they just happen to be people who were in ascendance at the exact moment that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* debuted. I am talking, of course, about computer people.

We've been spectacularly failing to track the rise of computers in Doctor Who, but it's unmistakably the case that it's been happening. By my count, which is off the top of my head and very possibly wrong, Hartnell had one story in which a computer functioned as a primary antagonist. Troughton had somewhere between zero and two depending on how you want to count. Pertwee had one. Baker has had two within a year of each other, travels with a computer dog, and is only going to encounter more of the things in his final three years (you can justify at least four more stories of the Baker era as having a significant focus on computers).

None of this is surprising given that computers were, at this point in history, in the early stages of the transition from being high-end military/academic/industrial devices to being consumer products. The Atari 2600, though really a video gaming console and not a personal computer, came out in the US while *The Invisible Enemy* was airing. Also in 1977 came the release of the so-called trinity of the Commodore PET, the TRS-80, and the Apple II. Computer kits had existed for a few years, allowing hobbyists to build their own computers, which instilled a DIY ethos that has, over time, morphed into the Open Source movement of today. Within three years the BBC would get involved with the BBC Micro, while the most famous British computer, the ZX Spectrum, would follow a year later. And, of course, in 1980 Tom Baker and Lalla Ward would be the spokespeople for the American-made Prime Computer.

There is a particular aesthetic associated with being good at computers. The ability to work well with structured logic and discrete mathematics isn't just important, it's suggestive. But unlike the megalomaniacal blowhards depicted back in *Tomb of the Cybermen*, the computer science crowd was altogether more playful with their commitments to logic, reveling in paradoxes and ambiguities. These were not, by and large, people who believed that logic would clearly and unambiguously solve all of the problems of the world, but rather people who believed that logic just proved that the world was very, very strange. This resulted in, among other things, a focus on language and linguistics, partially because cracking natural language was (and is) one of the biggest problems in computer science, and partially because the ambiguities of language were not dissimilar to the logical paradoxes that were also fascinating. (There is a reason why, if you discover a postmodernist science person, they almost certainly have considerable computer experience.)

The really obvious book to point out in this context is *Gödel, Escher, Bach*,

Douglas Hofstadter's 1979 classic, a sprawling 800-page tome of word games that coined the term "strange loop" to describe the self-referential paradoxes that characterize the field. But an even more obvious thing to point at is the anarchic "hacking" culture of MIT. Starting all the way back in the 1950s, MIT developed a particular culture of regard for the hack – a virtuosic feat accomplished via the clever understanding of a given system's idiosyncrasies. As computers became more and more central to everyday life, so did the aesthetics of those who knew a lot about them.

These aesthetics match up perfectly with Douglas Adams, who was in effect engaging in hacker performances with the logic of everyday life by splicing it with the logic of Doctor Who. And so Adams was triumphantly embraced by computer people; he very much became one himself. Indeed, he helped create two computer games for Infocom, including a quite underrated text adventure of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. (The game is normally panned for excessive difficulty, which, while it is a reason why it's tough to enjoy in 2011, is a non-starter for when it was released. It's hard, yes, but it's hard in a way that is firmly part of the text adventure aesthetic. The frustrating parts of its difficulty come from the fact that nobody makes games like it anymore, not from the fact that it was unfair for what it was.)

But what's important to note is that the things that made Adams appealing to computer science people aren't just idiosyncrasies on his part. They stem very logically from the Cambridge Footlights tradition he came up through. The highly structured treatment of absurd systems that Adams uses is absolutely a development of the comedy in *Python's Flying Circus* and *Fawlty Towers*, and the wave of America-friendly British comics that followed (including non-Cambridge sorts like Eddie Izzard) continued in that vein. So it wasn't just that Douglas Adams was popular among the up-and-coming computer people, but that Douglas Adams was the most overtly geek-friendly of a larger movement within British culture and comedy that was by-and-large compatible with the advancement of technology.

And these connections are relatively deep. A compelling case can be made, for instance, about various other similarities between MIT and Cambridge. Both have several traditions revolving around footbridges over their respective rivers, a love of student pranks that involve putting obscure objects in inaccessible places, and a rivalry with an older and more established university in which almost all of the creativity and maintenance of the rivalry takes place on the younger side. And, of course, MIT is in Cambridge, Massachusetts. These days they even have a substantial student exchange program. There is, in other words, a definite sense in which Cambridge was oddly positioned to pull off the Cambridge Invasion, having as it did a world class theatrical troupe and a culture that lent itself to the rising computer culture.

For the next three years this subculture intertwines heavily with Doctor Who. The most obvious way in which this happens, of course, is Douglas Adams's own work on Doctor Who. But when mentioning virtuosic and tightly

structured writers who occasionally get drunk on their own cleverness, there was one obvious guy I left off the list. And he may have something to add to our discussion of this approach as well...

A Trickster or a Warrior (*The Ribos Operation*)

It's September 2, 1978. The Commodores are at number one with "Three Times a Lady," and stay there for three weeks politely holding off Boney M, a European disco group. They are eventually unseated by 10cc's "Dreadlock Holiday." Andy Gibb, John Travolta and Olivia Newton John, ABBA, and Siouxsie and the Banshees also chart, the latter with their debut single "Hong Kong Garden," which means we've officially made it into post-punk, emphasizing just how short the actual window of "punk" was.

Since we casually dumped Leela back on Gallifrey, the former Prime Minister of Italy, Aldo Moro, was kidnapped and murdered by Marxist terrorists, and the current prime minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was sentenced to death. Regular radio broadcasts of Parliament start in the UK, and, more tragically, regular newspaper publication of *Garfield* started in the US. Pope Paul VI died, and Pope John Paul I ascended to the papacy. Within a week of the last episode of *The Ribos Operation*, he dies too.

Moving backwards towards September 2, then, Carl Bridgewater, a thirteen-year-old paperboy, is shot and killed when he disturbs a burglary in progress in Staffordshire. Four men are eventually arrested and imprisoned for it, though the case is controversial to say the least. The Camp David Accords are signed between Israel and Egypt. Georgi Markov is murdered via a poison pellet injected via an umbrella in London. And the Camp David meetings begin.

While on television... actually, let's start a bit before television. This is the famed Key to Time season, Doctor Who's first attempt at a season arc. I say attempt pointedly in its capacity as a word that does not necessarily imply success. I don't mean to flip ahead excessively, but it all ends in Baker and Martin. Still, the arc has many ways in which it works and does interesting things, and besides, there's not really a way into the season that doesn't deal with it.

Normally in situations like this I have to go beat some sense out of the concepts with some close-reading coupled with a working knowledge of silly intellectual trends and, when all else fails, unsupported speculation. But this time I don't have to, because Graham Williams did it for me in a spectacularly weird memo penned when he got the job and briefly considered doing the Key to Time in his first season.

The memo, reprinted in Howe, Stammers, and Walker's coffee table book on Doctor Who in the '70s, is staggeringly long. It opens with a mildly crank account of particle physics, in which Williams manages to pivot to where the weak nuclear force has become a quasi-mystical source of power for the Time Lords, who can manipulate it to a limited extent. However because of the quasi-mystical nature of this force, it becomes a problem – as Williams puts it,

"Control cannot be allowed to rest in the hands of so capricious a people." He then executes a flawless turn into the following sentence: "Eternity and Infinity, as concepts, do not, by their very nature, allow for an absolute Authority – the Pyramidal Hierarchy stretches through Time and Space and can have no apex."

This is a very, very strange and not entirely coherent sentence. The first bit, about "Eternity and Infinity" not allowing for absolute authority, is presumably a warmed-over attempt at William Blake. (The alternative is that it is a bewilderingly vague stab at the "can God make a rock so heavy he can't lift it" paradox that has not actually troubled anyone who has worked with philosophy or theology at any length for some time, the answer being that "all-powerful" includes the capability to transcend the law of non-contradiction.) More problematic is his use of the phrase "Pyramidal Hierarchy" to describe something that cannot possibly have an apex, a sentence in which the overwhelming majority of interpretations simply have to take the premise that Graham Williams does not know what words mean, given that a pyramid, as a geometric figure, is defined by the fact that it has an apex. Still, his gist seems clear enough: it's turtles all the way down.

Given that, Williams imagines the next set of turtles as a balance between good and evil, which he describes in terms of the fact that Hitler believed in his principles too – in other words, as a gibbering piece of moral relativism. At this point, let's note that we're only about one page into this monstrosity, which goes on for a while switching back and forth between the ideas of an infinite hierarchy of authorities and the idea that all things can be reduced into binary oppositions, while simultaneously holding the position that there is only one binary opposition. (He says, "There exist in our section of the universe... two Guardians. One is for 'Good', one is for 'Evil'. One for 'Construction', one for 'Destruction'. One for… the opposites are infinite, as they must be.") He then proposes the Key to Time as an instrument of balance that has fallen into the hands of the Black, and a quest in which the Doctor must reclaim its six segments.

A sentence that begins with "The strangest thing in this memo is..." has a staggering number of reasonable ways to end, but in a broad sense the bulk of these endings must focus on the way in which William clearly wants to suggest that the Doctor is not straightforwardly an agent of good any more than he's an agent of evil, while simultaneously demonstrating that Williams isn't nearly stupid enough to say something like that to a television executive. This is worth remarking on in part because it's wholly consistent with the rest of the Williams era thus far. The anarchic and punkish tendencies that Robert Holmes displayed in *The Sun Makers* are, in part, a move beyond the idea that progress comes from the espousing of the good and towards an idea of progress as a freestanding force of change. This is, in its own way, nothing more than a restatement of the moral ambiguity found in Troughton's Doctor at his best.

The problem is really that Williams, in the memo, doesn't seem quite sure what to do from this realization. On the one hand, he gets implicitly that the

Doctor must be closer to the "good" Guardian than the "evil" one. On the other, as Tat Wood points out when talking about this story, there's a steady sense of the Doctor outgrowing his bosses over time. First he outgrows UNIT, and then the Time Lords. Simply setting him up with a new boss clearly isn't going to work, either. The end of Williams's memo gestures at this, suggesting that the final revelation is going to have to include some sort of step in which it becomes clear that there's a larger game involved in all of this than was immediately apparent. (We'll see how that plays out in *The Armageddon Factor*. Spoiler: not that well.)

In any case, faced with the task of getting this hazily-conceptualized behemoth of a story off the ground, Williams and Read did the single most sensible thing imaginable: they hired Robert Holmes to do it. And for their troubles they got a sublimely good script.

At the center of Holmes's script is Williams's notion of the same conflicts playing out on different scales. The conflicts of the Guardians give way to the conflicts of Ribos's Sun and Ice Gods, which give way to the political conflicts the Graff is a part of, which gives way to the petty crimes of Garron and Unstoffe. These shifts in scale are not flagged or called attention to in any particular way. Instead the script moves calmly and confidently among them, opting not to explain the vast philosophical edifice it's built on but instead to simply demonstrate it.

This, in turn, is connected to another philosophical line of thought: the Hinchcliffe-era (and thus Holmes-era) theme of history's reiterations; Ribos is recognizably a medieval planet with obvious parallels to Earth. So not only do the same conflicts play out on different scales, they play out across different iterations of history. Similarly, the conflict between Ribos's gods is seen to play out through the shifting of the planet's very long seasons, aligning the conflicts with the realms of man and nature. It is a structure of frightening elegance that rivals the triumph of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The first and most obvious thing this structure allows Holmes to do is to handle the gapingly obvious problem that this and every single other attempt to do "epic" Doctor Who is ever going to face. To quote Eddie Izzard, "You're British. Scale it down a bit." This downscaling is one of the most masterful in Doctor Who's history – even more triumphant than Holmes's previous record best in *The Brain of Morbius*. Here, Holmes exploits the basic premise of the epic to seamlessly change the conflict of gods into the story of a pair of washed-up con men.

But the most interesting thing that Holmes does in the course of the story is to duplicate the Doctor across the numerous levels of the story. The first and most obvious duplication is, of course, Romana. It's worth pausing here, just a moment, to gape at the sheer breadth of influence that Holmes has over the course of the series, and note that this is actually the fourth of five times in which Robert Holmes would end up writing a new companion's first script. (Nitpickers: I am correct. You can figure out why for yourself. Check the

production order of episodes.) Two of the previous three times the new companion was a relatively straightforward modification of her predecessor. Liz Shaw was in many ways a contemporary Earth-based Zoe, and Sarah Jane was a light modification of the plucky adventuring spirit of Jo. This time, however, Holmes is back in the territory he visited in *Terror of the Autons* where the new companion is an explicit reaction against the previous one. Having done the "ignorant savage" with Leela, the series now has a companion who is largely the Doctor's equal.

Except she's not. She's something altogether stranger. Lawrence Miles and Tat Wood find themselves feeling around parts of an elephant here in an interesting way. This is normal for their takes on this particular period – *About Time* splits into "prosecution" and "defense" critiques of every episode. Wood offers the "defense" critiques of the Williams era, and is generally on sounder footing here than Miles, who tends to rely on narratological dogma in order to conclude that nobody could possibly care about a given story, which is a problematic assertion given that loads of people demonstrably do. For Wood, the "audience identification" role normally inhabited by the companion is "surplus to requirements" in this story, and thus Tamm works well, whereas Miles complains that Tamm obviously doesn't take the role seriously and that this is a problem.

This supposed dualism, however, misses an important fact obvious to anybody who sat through much of the previous season: the audience identification role, for a large swath of the audience, would in fact be defined by not taking the story seriously. Romana provides the story with a vehicle to overtly critique its own premises – an activity defined most obviously by her tendency to analyze the Doctor's character traits and reflect on the foibles of his psychology. So while she is indeed not taking the story "seriously," there is, if you will, a genuine seriousness to her dismissal of it. Her role is to rein in the Doctor and bring balance to him. She is at once a second Doctor and the Doctor's counterpart.

This dual role illustrates one of the fundamental tricks Holmes uses to navigate the underlying philosophical quagmire: he has different levels of the system interact with each other in not-quite-harmonious ways. Just because two characters fill the same structural role within their respective milieus does not mean that they will get along or consistently help each other. (Nor, of course, does it mean they'll be at each other's throats – Romana and the Doctor do get on, generally, but on the other hand there's continual and visible tension between them.) The same structures recur across time and across social situations, but as we have observed before, reiteration is not exact duplication. Differences exist.

This brings us to our second obvious duplicate of the Doctor, namely Garron. Played with magnificent relish by Iain Cuthbertson (familiar also as the villain of *Children of the Stones*, in which he and his butler, Broton, attempt to destroy Roj Blake), Garron duplicates the Doctor's anarchic function of bringing balance to the world through the subversion of its order. Most notably, Garron

strides around the story with the most preposterously insane and delightfully brilliant scheme that Holmes has found yet for his vast array of con men and hucksters. Garron plants evidence of a valuable mineral (of which he happens to own one sizable piece of) on a backwater planet and then attempts to con someone into buying the planet, which Garron in fact has no right to sell.

Garron, like the Doctor, is an actively transgressive character both diegetically (as a con man necessarily is) and extra-diegetically. This latter role is most obvious when the Doctor identifies him as a human (as opposed to a native of Ribos, despite the fact that they look indistinguishable from humans) because of his regional British accent – another in a lengthy and still charming series of baits and switches in which a detail that is instinctively interpreted by the audience as part of the default conventions of the show (everyone in the universe has an English accent) turns out to exist diegetically and be of narrative import. (The original such instance, of course, is David Whitaker's brilliant fake monster in *The Rescue*, where it turns out that the monster has in fact been a man in an obviously fake rubber suit all along.)

But the existence of Garron as a Doctor analogue raises a larger and stranger issue for the narrative. The Doctor, ostensibly at least, is the hero of the story. Even if we accept what Williams clearly gestures at in his memo and grant that the Doctor is not a "good guy" in the conventional sense of that word, crafting an account of the show in which he is not even the object of the audience's sympathies but merely of their fascination is a radical step. And yet Garron, a clear analogue of the Doctor, is not a hero. Nor, crucially, is he a villain. He switches gamely between antagonist and ally, sometimes within the space of a single line.

For a fleeting moment it is hinted that Garron might be an agent of the Black Guardian, but this too is clearly wrong. Still, it raises an interesting larger point. Ostensibly within this story the Doctor serves the White Guardian. But if we were to extend the logic of the Guardians (as Craig Hinton did in a story slipped into a fan-made benefit book), we would almost necessarily, when dealing with order and chaos, give order to the White and chaos to the Black.

This is further reinforced with the Guardian's appearance at the beginning of *The Ribos Operation*, which is, as Tat Wood observes, blatantly a case of God himself showing up to boss the Doctor around. But the White Guardian is an old white man sitting on some sun-kissed beach surrounded by the trappings of empire. And the Doctor visibly loathes him, even as he consents to the mission (if only because the White Guardian threatens him). More broadly, in the order/chaos debate, we know what side the Doctor favors these days. Pertwee is far in the rear-view mirror.

On the other hand, the Black Guardian is clearly intended to be a capricious dictator, with the Graff being his obvious representative within the narrative. To ally the Doctor with him is clearly incorrect. So where is the Doctor in the larger moral schema here? Some people have attempted to create more Guardians in order to deal with this problem, but this solution, while a

philosophically sound way to handle excessive dualism, clearly has no basis in Williams's intentions or in the scripts for the period. This is clearly meant to be a dualist conception of the universe. So to return to the question we were stumbling on in the Williams memo itself: What gives?

The answer comes from the third Doctor analogue in the script, and Holmes's best touch in what is already one of his best scripts: Binro the Heretic. Clearly based on Giordano Bruno (himself an occultist and alchemist, providing yet another instance of Doctor Who's most improbable recurring motif), Binro is a rag-clad vagabond within the world of Ribos, cast out of society for his heretical claim that the twinkling lights in the sky are other suns.

The Doctor parallels are clear even beyond the mildly-strained Giordano Bruno/alchemy connection. Binro is a character that adheres to all of the traditional values associated with Doctor Who: kind, altruistic, stands up for his convictions, rationalist and intelligent in a world of superstition, and unwilling to bow to authority. He is cut off from Ribosian society because of his belief in a world beyond what Ribos sees – a clear parallel to the Doctor's own exile. And, on a basic level, surely all heretics are friends of the Doctor.

What is most interesting about Binro, then, is that he never meets the Doctor. He is gunned down by the Graff's men in the fourth episode right in front of the Doctor, but the Doctor is disguised as a guard and never even learns who Binro was. The most natural set of allies in the entirety of the story never actually share a scene, with Binro instead providing a Doctor-like role to Unstoffe in the Doctor's absence, thus functioning fully and truly as the Doctor reiterated onto the scale of Ribos instead of the scale of the cosmos. And yet this scene serves as the emotional heart of the story, with Binro's death sparking off a shockingly violent conclusion in which the bulk of the secondary characters are slaughtered in a manner that would have been considered terribly violent and over the top if Philip Hinchcliffe were still the producer. It is, in other words, Binro's murder that brings the entire house of cards crashing down. The death of a Doctor surrogate is what makes it finally impossible to maintain the fragile equilibrium of the story – a key moral point about the nature of the Key to Time.

The other emotional heart of the story (and if any show can have two emotional hearts, surely it is Doctor Who) is Unstoffe's revelation to Binro that not only is he right, but the only fault his theories can meaningfully be said to have is that they are not heretical enough. None of the ways in which Binro is wrong about anything are cases where being closer to the position of all the other Ribosians would help. In other words, the heart of the story is when Binro gets to peer across the gulf of scale up towards the Doctor and the Guardians, neither of whom ever look down and notice Binro.

But if the Doctor is a reiteration of Binro on a larger scale and in different social circumstances then what is the Doctor's heresy? It is tempting to suggest that it's whatever made him rebel and leave Gallifrey, but one of the major points of this story has been that the Doctor has moved beyond the Time Lords. No. The obvious conclusion to draw from Binro's presence is that the Doctor is

in some sense heretical with regards to the philosophical system of this story. It cannot possibly be a coincidence that the same story in which the Doctor is given his marching orders by God himself is the story in which the single most sympathetic supporting character is a proclaimed heretic.

This, then, makes considerable sense out of the odd problems introduced by Garron and the Doctor's obvious lack of straightforward allegiance to either the Black or the White Guardians. Presented with a radically dualist universe, the Doctor's reaction is essentially to reject the entire premise. And, of course, he's right to do so. If the Black Guardian is a callous tyrant like the Graff, and the White is an old colonial master, then rejecting them in favor of a third option is clearly the correct choice. "Order and chaos" may be a phrase that goes together, but it no more forms a fundamental dualism of the universe than "jam and bread" does. Chaos, by its nature, does not fit into orderly dualisms, and the Doctor's role in this epic is not to bring balance between White and Black but to reject the notion of "fundamental balances" altogether.

What is most interesting about all of this is that even as Holmes deconstructs the entire premise of the Key to Time, he doesn't reject it. The Doctor remains on his mission. This is firmly the first part of a longer epic. And there is still a powerful and compelling sense of scale to it. Holmes's anarchic pluck does not challenge any of that. Instead it just challenges the dogmatism of the mythos, rejecting the ways in which the mythos gets in the way of the myth.

It is, in other words, Holmes's reaction against *Star Wars* and its maniacal devotion to the monomyth. Here is a story with all the epic sweep of *Star Wars* done on a BBC budget, and one that deconstructs its own mythology to boot. Plus, it has jokes in it. We started this piece with an observation as to how punk had given way to post-punk with considerable haste. Now, having introduced the punk subversion of the order of things in *The Sun Makers*, Holmes moves on to Doctor Who's first truly post-punk story.

Like post-punk itself, the anarchic spirit, the urge to tear it all down, and the rejection of dogmatic depictions of the future or destiny remain. But now these are coupled with unambiguous positive investments. On the surface, this is a contradiction. The anarchic "tear it all down" nature of punk is, superficially, a strange bedfellow for any sort of investment in what "should be" – or any sort of construction. But this viewpoint has never been held by anybody who actually understands punk in the first place. As Robert Holmes shows us, chaos is not some Manichean opposite of order. The Doctor, like post-punk itself, is proof enough of that.

Are the Guardians Canon?

This may, at first glance, seem a strange question. For one thing, as has been discussed fairly extensively at this point, there's no such thing as Doctor Who canon anyway. For another, why wouldn't the Guardians be canon? They appear multiple times over multiple seasons of Doctor Who and are a beloved part of the lore, at least among a certain type of fan, which is to say, the sort of fan who might buy this book.

Nevertheless, there's something to it. The "it's all true" ethos of Doctor Who canon has always been built as much on strategically ignoring bits as on embracing them. So what "it's all true" really means is that canon is defined by the present. Doctor Who canon is whatever bits of the past are influencing the story you're telling right now, and "it's all true" means that any past Doctor Who is theoretically fair game for influencing the present. So when we ask, "Are the Guardians canon?" – just like when we ask "Are Looms canon?" and "Is Faction Paradox canon?" in future volumes – what we're really asking is, "Are the Guardians something that's actively influencing Doctor Who anymore, or are they, like much of Doctor Who's history, an idea that had its vogue on screen and has now faded away?"

Of course, unlike the Looms and Faction Paradox, which belong to spin-off media and thus default to a certain dubious status, the idea that the Guardians might not be canon is, in and of itself, provocative enough to tip my hand disgracefully. So what's the problem, exactly? Why do the Guardians not quite fit in with the rest of Doctor Who? Well, on a basic level, because a dualistic notion of the universe as governed by, in effect, a good god and an evil one is really hard to square away with the larger morality of Doctor Who, especially when the good god is linked with "order" and the evil one with "chaos."

One of the most consistent themes of Doctor Who, after all, is that order might not be all it's cracked up to be, and that a certain amount of chaos is necessary for social progress. That's what the Doctor is, generally speaking: the necessary bit of chaos and, as the usual *TARDIS Eruditorum* idiom would have it, mercury. This is embedded in the basic structure of Doctor Who as a narrative: the arrival of the TARDIS always coincides with a moment where the status quo shifts and change takes place. That's how Doctor Who plots work: the Doctor shows up and destabilizes things.

That's obviously not to make some Blakean suggestion that the Doctor is of the Black Guardian's party and doesn't know it – the Doctor isn't for unchecked destruction any more than he's for the preservation of order for its own sake. But it is to suggest that having the Doctor exist in a universe where these judgments are made in the form of metaphysically-enforced dualism is a problem. On a pretty basic level, the answer to "Does the world of Doctor Who

in 2014 appear to be governed by the Guardians?" is "No."

But then, it's not entirely clear that the world of Doctor Who in 1978 was governed by the Guardians either. Certainly Robert Holmes, in *The Ribos Operation*, is pretty solidly committed to deconstructing any notion of absolute order in the universe: while the dualistic conflict between the Guardians recurs in various combinations on various levels throughout the world, he presents that world as where the real story isn't their timeless and interminable conflict, but rather the ordinary people who get caught up in the gears of history. And *The Armageddon Factor* ends with the sense that the entire quest was a bit of a sham, with the White Guardian never actually getting the Key to Time, and the vague implication that the entire thing was just a trap by the Black Guardian.

This would even be a valid interpretation if it weren't for the Black Guardian trilogy in 1983, which established with zero ambiguity that both the White and Black Guardians exist, the White Guardian is the good guy, the Black Guardian is the bad guy, and both of them wear bizarre headdresses made of birds. Certainly those Guardians are the very definition of a dualistic system with clear-cut and unambiguous ideas of good and evil.

But this is hardly the only time in the John Nathan-Turner era that an idea that had previously been full of ambiguity and nuance gets reduced to the most basic interpretation possible. So let's ignore the Season Twenty Guardians for the sake of this essay, and ask instead about the Season Sixteen iteration. Because in 1978, anyone writing about a dualistic universe split between order and chaos would be doing so having just read an awful lot of Michael Moorcock, who had spent most of the previous two decades writing a bevy of interconnected series about manifestations of the "Eternal Champion," who battles to maintain balance between the cosmic forces of Law and Chaos.

For anyone who has read Moorcock, the influence on Season Sixteen is obvious enough: the Doctor is off to get the Key to Time specifically so that the White Guardian can rebalance the cosmos. But there's a subtle shift that subtly undermines Moorcock's approach, which is that it's the White Guardian doing the rebalancing. The point of Moorcock's dualism is ultimately that if either side wins, it would be absolutely awful. But the Guardians seem to incorporate "balance vs. imbalance" into their dualism, so that the White Guardian is also the Guardian of the Guardians being balanced.

Douglas Adams, rewriting the end of *The Armageddon Factor*, seems to see the problem here and rejiggers it to have the Doctor opt out of letting anyone have the Key to Time, which helps, but the fact remains that it's not hard to see how John Nathan-Turner and Eric Saward might have come to the conclusion that the Guardians were intended to be straightforward depictions of good and evil. This is most certainly one of those occasions where the source material is rather more nuanced and interesting than Doctor Who's riff on it.

But in all of this there's an interesting wrinkle, namely the Key to Time itself – specifically the description of how it works, in that it allows the entirety of time to be "stopped" for a moment. The idea of freezing time is common

enough in Doctor Who, but it's important to remember that the Key to Time exists outside of linear time, its pieces spread across galaxies and millennia. So the sense in which time stops is clearly not merely a time freeze, but something far vaster – a cessation of time as a concept in the universe.

One might fairly ask, then, why the supposedly powerful Guardians require time to be stopped before they can make their adjustments to the world. One answer, I would posit, is that the existence of time, in the Time Lord sense of time as a subjectively experienced historical process, is already anathema to the Guardians. Certainly this seems to be the subtext of *The Ribos Operation*, where the truly important characters are con men and heretics. And it seems compatible with the conclusion the Doctor reaches in *The Armageddon Factor* – his declining to give the Key to Time to anybody is easily enough read as a decision that the basic idea of stopping time is terrible, and that proper balance between the Guardians rests in the historical process itself. In this view, far from being gods, the Guardians are somewhat undesirable entities, an alternative view of what the universe might be that's based not on historical materialism, but on absolute and transcendent metaphysical concepts.

This still requires ignoring the Guardians as they appear in the three Davison-era stories. And it involves, if not ignoring a fair bit of Season Sixteen, at least a fair bit of willfully misreading Season Sixteen. But it does, at least, provide an image of the Guardians that fits aesthetically with the rest of Doctor Who. This may not quite count as being canon, but the truth is, it captures the way these themes are thought about more widely in Doctor Who a heck of a lot better than what's on screen.

To Fight a Bigger War (*The Pirate Planet*)

It's September 30, 1978. John Travolta and Olivia Newton John are at the top of the charts with "Summer Nights," one of the classic cuts from *Grease*, and I'm going to go wash my fingers out with soap for even typing that phrase. This situation lasts for four weeks, and at two separate points other songs from *Grease* (John Travolta's solo "Sandy" and Frankie Valli's title track) also chart. In addition, ABBA, the Commodores, Exile (with "Kiss You All Over," a country song whose sales may owe more to the topless woman on the single cover than to the song itself), Electric Light Orchestra, and the Boomtown Rats also chart, the latter with something other than "I Don't Like Mondays."

People who do like Mondays include the New York Yankees, who defeat arch-rivals the Boston Red Sox on Monday, October 2, to make it to the AL East title (having been fourteen games out of place a mere two months earlier) on their way towards winning the World Series, and Karol Józef Wojtyła, who becomes Pope John Paul II on Monday, October 16. Other eventful days of the week include Sundays, when Tuvalu becomes independent from the UK and Vietnam attacks Cambodia, and Fridays, as the first Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras takes place. Designed as a protest march to commemorate the Stonewall Riots, the event attains a permit, which is then revoked leading to numerous arrests and public outings of people for what had been a legal activity. We can also include Tuesdays, as a massive electrical fault brings down NASA's SEASAT satellite after only 105 days of operation.

While on Saturdays, we have *The Pirate Planet*. Despite being a story by Douglas Adams, and thus an object of no small prestige for the series, *The Pirate Planet* is not actually all that popular a story. This is, on the whole, terribly unfair. For the most part, the objections to this story haven't changed since 1978, with the major lines of critique closely paralleling the production difficulties at the time. These difficulties centered on two major concerns. First, Adams's scripts required substantial revision. This fact is taken by some as evidence of Adams's flaws as a writer, which would make total sense if the script editor hadn't, at the end of the season, recommended Adams as his replacement. All reports in fact suggest that the problem with Adams's scripts was that it was excessively complex. While I'm not saying that this isn't a potential problem, we ought to be honest about the sort of problem it is. Writing above the level of complexity that Doctor Who should go for is, as problems go, easier to fix than, say, a script loaded with Bob Baker and David Martin. That does not, of course, mean the script is good (though it is, as we'll see), but at the very least there's no strong reason to think it's bad.

The second problem that came up was when Head of Serials Graeme

MacDonald objected to the story as it was shaping up on the grounds of its excessive humor. This objection is problematic in two regards. First, we should recall that the entire reason that Williams was pursuing humorous scripts like those which one could expect from Douglas Adams was because of the Mary Whitehouse-inspired edict not to do so much horror. Comedy scripts, in other words, are a reaction to why he got the job in the first place, and pushing him away from comedy becomes a case of, if not outright contradictory instructions, at least a BBC that isn't going to be satisfied with anything. (This will become a recurring theme in the remainder of the classic series.) Second, however, and rather more significantly, reading Douglas Adams's script as simply being "comedy" badly misunderstands what's going on here. This, however, feeds back into the complaint that the script was too complex. Because while it's not a straightforward comedy, this fact was, it appears, rather lost on several of the people making it.

The first thing we should note about Adams's script is that there are some intensely serious issues lurking about underneath the humor. First and foremost is Adams's idea to do a story about drug addiction that took it seriously as a moral problem. The moral question, to be clear, was not simply "Are drugs bad?" but an altogether more subtle issue. What interested Adams, essentially, was the question of what the moral justification was for cracking down on drug use given that the drug users themselves ostensibly didn't suffer so much as they enjoyed themselves. Central to this exploration was Queen Xanxia, suspended in the last moments of her life and requiring increasing power (i.e. drugs) to maintain her current state – a clear parallel to the way in which drug addicts require increasingly large doses to achieve the same high. This ultimately proves to be how he creates his new and improved moral case against drug addiction.

Admittedly, the direct analogy between what's going on in this story and drug use faded somewhat in the final version, with it not being entirely clear in the transmitted version that Queen Xanxia is effectively a drug addict, but the basic logic is sound. Adams's idea is a classic science fiction idea, with its most famous execution probably being Ursula K. LeGuin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." The core of it hinges on the basic philosophical debate over utilitarianism: is a comparatively small amount of evil justifiable in the name of a greater practical good?

This theme is still fairly clear in the story, of course: consider the fact that the bulk of the population of Zanak is perfectly happy with the default state of affairs. People repeatedly implore the Doctor not to get involved and upend things on the grounds that there are no obvious problems – the planet is prosperous, everyone is more or less happy, and other than a roving gang of low-level psychics, nothing is really wrong. Initially, at least, this is a world that not only resists the Doctor's intrusion but that appears to have a perfectly good reason for doing so. The only thing that really drives the Doctor forward is a mystery of the sort that wouldn't even be a mystery in any other season but the Key to Time season. Yes, the planet isn't Calufrax, but the TARDIS lands on the

wrong planet regularly; absent the knowledge that the TARDIS actually is being driven to deliberate locations this season, the insistence that the coordinates check out would comes off as nothing more than the sort of "Of course we're where I said we'd be" grumpiness that the Doctor has been engaging in since *The Reign of Terror*. As reasons to overthrow a society go, not only is this one relatively thin, it cuts against the basic shape of the program – it takes a very long time for Zanak to look like a planet that the Doctor should intervene in.

This is also where the allegedly excessive humor of the story enters. On one level there is a constant sense, when watching *The Pirate Planet*, that this is exactly what Adams was talking about when he complained about actors seeing comedy and deciding to do over-the-top performances and funny voices, with Bruce Purchase's Pirate Captain being the most obvious offender. But Adams here gives himself too little credit. Purchase's scene devouring is a perfect accompaniment to a story that already features an evil robotic parrot but (more brilliantly) features a fight scene between the parrot and K-9. The story is, and let's be honest here, willfully silly, and it's unmistakably Adams who is responsible for this.

No, the defense of the "silliness" in this story doesn't hinge on trying to sequester the blame to one or two people. It hinges on the fact that the silliness sets up one of the best shifts in tone that the series has ever managed. Between the overtly and almost excessively comedic texture of the world and the lack of any immediate threat, the audience is lulled into a sense of utter complacency. This complacency is only heightened by the repeated stumbles the program has taken lately. At first, every piece of evidence suggests we're in *Invisible Enemy* territory again. In reality, however, the story has a very conscious turn towards the serious that is made all the more shocking by the apparent frivolity leading up to it.

This is, admittedly, a bit of a risk. It's not as though the model that the story is flirting with has been a particularly successful one for the series. But on the other hand, it's certainly a model that is, at this point, well-defined within the series. For better or for worse... eh, why pretend. For worse, this is a part of what the program is now. You may as well use the tools you have, and *The Pirate Planet* certainly does.

The first and most famed twist comes with the Doctor's sputtering outrage at the Captain's plans, and when asked whether he appreciates the engineering of Zanak, Baker's subsequent monologue is rightly hailed as one of the high points of his tenure. "Appreciate it?" he asks, in horror. "You commit mass destruction and murder on a scale that's almost inconceivable and you ask me to appreciate it?" But the degree to which this monologue is praised obscures the degree to which it's shocking. Being the bit of this story fans all know about going in, its arrival is expected. And because it's such a great moment for Baker, there is a tendency to forget that its power comes from how unusual it is to see Baker in this mode.

For all of Baker's strutting and dominance, it's been a surprisingly long

time since we've seen him take such an unambiguously moralistic stand. Typically, Baker's rhetorical weapon against evil is dismissal, as characterized by his brilliant take-down of the Rutan in *Horror of Fang Rock*, where instead of a stirring speech about the indomitable nature of human beings he casually brushes off the Rutan as a "defeated dictator." Here, however, he's simmering with rage, and his condemnation of the moral obscenity of Zanak's genocidal existence is like nothing else we've ever seen from him. The scene would be par for the course for Pertwee, but from Baker's mouth it serves to escalate the stakes of the story in one shot. It's a brilliant contrast: one of the silliest stories we've ever seen is also the one that provokes the most furious reaction from the Doctor.

The second twist is less hailed, though Tat Wood praises it repeatedly in *About Time*. It comes at the start of the fourth episode as a cliffhanger about the Doctor being forced to walk the plank is resolved. First, inevitably, some context: over the course of the story there is a slow and relentless move to the foreground of a female character on the bridge of Zanak. When she first appears in the second episode, she seems to be an assistant of some sort to the Captain, and in this capacity she attracts little attention. Indeed, for a viewer aware of the habits of individual directors, she looks like little more than the standard Pennant Roberts female character (although, admittedly, it's hard to imagine a fan obsessive enough to know that Roberts typically changed a male character into a female one when directing a story, but who doesn't know the twists of *The Pirate Planet*). Slowly, however, she rises to the forefront, until by the end of the third episode she is clearly one of the primary antagonists.

Then, at the start of the fourth episode, the Doctor strides calmly into the room from which he was previously unceremoniously shoved down a kilometer drop and reveals that the Doctor who just fell to his death was in fact merely a holographic projection. This, however, is not the most remarkable thing about this cliffhanger resolution. The most remarkable thing about this cliffhanger resolution is the revelation that the female assistant is also a holographic projection of Queen Xanxia, and that the entire systematic destruction of planets thing has been entirely in service to attaining sufficient power to create a new body for her.

The fallout from this revelation ends up completely reconfiguring the audience's understanding of the story. Previously all evidence was that the Captain was in charge of the ship and that he was the primary antagonist. But it quickly becomes clear that the Captain is enslaved to the queen, who effectively tortures him into compliance, and that he has been covertly plotting her downfall for years. And from there the stakes get escalated gloriously, with the story's climax involving the Doctor risking the destruction of the TARDIS itself to stop Zanak. This too should be stressed: not since *The Time Monster* have we seen a story in which the TARDIS itself is put into danger. Eventually this sort of thing becomes a standard arrow in the show's quiver, but at this point it's an enormously credible upping of the stakes. Likewise, the final denouement –

suddenly shrinking from the scale of pitting the TARDIS against a planet to having the Mentiads just hit something with a wrench – is a delightful moment of Holmesian logic; just as the scale becomes epic, the power of the mundane reasserts itself.

The effect is a classic case of the old absurdist technique of slowly turning a joke from funny to horrifying – the sort of thing that Beckett, Ionesco, Albee, and, for that matter, *Monty Python* do routinely. And any criticism of the story as silly has to reckon with that fact, in no small part because to suggest that a comic writer of Adams's skill – one who in fact came up through *Python* (Adams had two bit appearances in the fourth and tragically John Cleese-free season of *Flying Circus*) – would stumble upon this sort of structure by accident is ridiculous. This is obviously what Adams intended the script to be; it's the bread and butter of the comedic tradition. Broad humor that takes a chilling turn towards darkness is the hallmark of absurdism.

There are flaws. Purchase's rendition of the Captain is weak not because of how ridiculous he is in the first three episodes – in fact, he's about the right amount of ridiculous there – but because he fails to stick the horror in the fourth episode, making the shock turn a conceptual twist as opposed to a visceral one. The sheer darkness of the Captain's situation is left just a little too vague, and only the broad humor really sticks in the memory.

It is, of course, a delicate balance. This particular absurdist turn is delicate to begin with. In most proper absurdist cases there's not a definitive turning point so much as a slow shift. (The textbook example is Edward Albee's sublime *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in which there is no particular moment where the intoxicated banter of the beginning of the play gives way to the horrifying attempts to ruin each other's lives that characterize the ending. Instead the audience is slowly moved from point A to point B, with the laughter gradually dying down to uncomfortable silence.) On top of that, dark comedy like this is tricky in Doctor Who in the first place. The Captain can't be too horrifying to children who, as a general rule, are not the ideal audience for existential horror. As scarring children for life is still off the menu following the Mary Whitehouse debacle, the show has to sort of reverse the formula of the old Adam West *Batman* series – a show that kids would think was funny but that would horrify adults.

All of which said, every story this season has to be taken not only on its own terms but in terms of the larger Key to Time arc. At first glance this seems likely to be rough on most of the stories. The Key to Time arc is notoriously thin, and the stories don't really hang together as an overall narrative; they are six disconnected stories with a common MacGuffin. Certainly it's the case that everything this season could have functioned as a Doctor Who story outside of the Key to Time structure. But that's hardly a fault. Williams would have been insane to discard the basic format of Doctor Who.

The more interesting question for any given story is how it intersects with the philosophical concepts of the larger arc. With *The Ribos Operation* this was

largely straightforward, as that story wore its philosophy on its sleeve. Here the matter is somewhat more complex. There are no obvious balances of competing dualisms at play in this story, after all. Instead this story starts to look at the one thing that, in hindsight, was conspicuously absent from *The Ribos Operation*: the Key to Time itself.

As described in *The Ribos Operation*, the Key to Time allows the universe to be paused and adjusted. Furthermore, its segments are scattered throughout space and time. These two facts are both, upon reflection, tremendously strange. The idea of "stopping" is, after all, a temporal concept. If the universe must be stopped at a particular point in order to maintain balance then there must be an inherent concept of "now." But in the context of beings that reign over even the Time Lords, that's at best dodgy. The Guardians surely exist outside of time. Certainly the quest for the Key to Time does, too – the Doctor grabs segments from various moments in time, cutting against the idea that there's a single moment the Key exists in relation to.

Even stranger, though, is the idea that the segments are scattered across space and time. The second segment, for instance (and it's also strange that the segments appear to have a real order as opposed to the incidental order by which the Doctor finds them), is a planet. Planets have lifespans measured in billions of years. To arrive upon Calufrax at a moment as significant as the Doctor does is far beyond the plausible realm of coincidence. And something like this happens with every segment. Despite the objects in question generally existing for thousands or millions of years, the Doctor somehow manages to turn up at moments when the objects are also at the heart of some other crisis.

Several possibilities exist, but ultimately all of them end up with some form of the conclusion that a segment of the Key is not merely an object but an object in a specific situation – i.e., that at any point prior to the Doctor's arrival, Calufrax was in some sense not ripe yet. In which case, it appears to be that a segment only properly becomes a segment in the midst of some sort of crisis. But all of this just begs the question – *what* sort of crisis? Is there anything that distinguishes or defines a segment of the Key to Time beyond its status as a MacGuffin in the plot?

Well, there are some similarities to be drawn. Most obviously, five of the six segments are in some fashion stolen. Furthermore, the theft of a segment usually throws a more or less stable situation into chaos. This all makes thematic sense. Segments of the Key to Time maintain balance on the small scale just as the entire Key maintains balance on the large scale. And just as the large scale is in crisis, so is every segment in crisis. It borders, in fact, on the neat and tidy. Except that for two stories running we have writers who are taking the piss out of it. First, Holmes decimated the notion of binary oppositions in *The Ribos Operation*. Now, Adams decimates the basic idea of balance.

Because make no mistake, the theme of balance is still completely in play in this story. The shrunken remains of planets are said to be in a delicate and perfect balance within the Captain's collection. Queen Xanxia herself is at a

balancing point between life and death, and there's a clear theme of balance between the destruction of planets and the luxuries of Zanak, with the growing power of the Mentiads reflecting the shifting nature of that balance. All of those themes are absolutely and seemingly deliberately there.

But Adams puts those elements there in part to be overshadowed by the sheer and horrific depravity of what Zanak is. This is the first time in some time – I can't even think of the last time, actually – that the Doctor has confronted someone actually engaged in the act of genocide. Yes, the Doctor has defeated numerous tyrants with genocidal dreams, but generally they're either washed up vegetable-enviers or mediocre wannabes. It's unusual for the Doctor to encounter a vast planet-decimating monstrosity (and let's note that Zanak is the Death Star done more cleverly) in its prime. And this is the obvious source of the Doctor's moral outrage in this story. We haven't seen someone so freshly responsible for the annihilation of entire species and cultures in Doctor Who in a long time. When the Doctor tells Romana that they've stumbled upon one of the biggest crimes in history, he's not lying. This isn't business as usual.

And that, I think, is Adams's point, that this abstracted philosophy about balance badly misses the fact that there are real moral horrors in the world. It's a staggering one-two punch from two writers both of whom surely make anybody's list of the ten best writers in Doctor Who. First Holmes knocks down the idea of binary oppositions with his usual "the personal is political" move of reducing everything to the mundane human level. Then Douglas Adams knocks down the idea of "balance" as a fundamental moral good by reminding us of the existence of atrocity. And both do it with wicked humor, jaw-droppingly baroque scripting, and a sense of flamboyant anti-authoritarianism.

The effect is that, two stories in, the Key to Time has magnificently collapsed from an epic Doctor Who story to an anti-epic – a story arc that subverts and mocks the very idea of the epic. For the first time, we have something that feels like a sense of what the Graham Williams era is trying to be, and, more to the point, just how brilliant a thing that can be.

Into Submission with My Charm
(*The Stones of Blood*)

It's October 28, 1978. John Travolta and Olivia Newton John continue to do unspeakable things on Summer Nights and are thus left to sing about them instead. This lasts for three weeks before The Boomtown Rats make it to number one with "Rat Trap." The Grease orgy continues lower in the charts with Olivia Newton-John making a solo appearance there. The Jacksons, The Cars, and Public Image Ltd also chart. That said, when crafting the "also chart" sentence I usually limit myself to the top ten, and as we're getting into the period where I actually love huge swaths of stuff going on lower in the charts, I think it's time to inaugurate a sentence about the lower reaches of the charts so I have an excuse to mention The Buzzcocks, The Jam, Blondie, and Elvis Costello, if only to reassure anyone who wasn't convinced by The Cars and Public Image Ltd that these are actually pretty good times for music. Having thusly reassured everyone, Donna Summer also charts with "MacArthur Park," proving that there's no hope at all and that we might as well just elect Margaret Thatcher or something.

In real news, we manage to avoid electing Margaret Thatcher for a bit longer. Instead, Dominica gains independence from the UK. Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin win the Nobel Peace Prize, an event that is in part notable because Jimmy Carter does not win it despite brokering that peace, setting up a rare case of an "Oops, sorry we forgot about you" Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. Rioters sack the British embassy in Tehran, California voters defeat an initiative to ban gay schoolteachers, and, the day after the final episode of this story airs, the first Take Back the Night march happens in San Francisco. But the big news story happens the day the final episode is broadcast: the Jonestown Massacre happens, resulting in the murder/suicide (we'll leave it ambiguous which victims were which) of a staggering 918 people.

While on television, we should probably go back and note the one thing we didn't mention in the *Pirate Planet* post, namely ITV's failed attempt to poach top BBC talent and compete on Saturdays. The key event is their poaching of Bruce Forsyth, previously host of the BBC's *Generation Game*, now host of ITV's rather more disastrous *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night*. This is notable as the second time in the Baker era that ITV has botched an attempt to kill off Doctor Who. Mysteriously, the architect of this plan, Michael Grade, would soon be poached by the BBC, which will lead to nothing but good things for everyone and especially for Doctor Who.

But for now, everyone is still watching the BBC, where the first of four and a half Doctor Who stories contributed by David Fisher is on. Fisher is an odd duck. Certainly he got the nightmare brief here; nobody in their right mind wants

to write the script coming after Robert Holmes and Douglas Adams. But if someone's got to have the nightmare brief, Fisher is a pretty solid choice. He's a competent writer who had actually been pursued by David Whitaker way back when he was script editor. He knows his science fiction, and makes an immediate bid to be considered an old reliable hand. Sadly, he only really has two seasons in that role before John Nathan-Turner makes the partially sane decision to stop hiring writers from before his time.

All of this is really me dancing around the crux of this story, which is that it's perfectly competent and works within the aesthetic and themes that have been set out in the last few stories, but it doesn't really advance them much. Its most creative element is that it checks off one of the boxes for things that this era of Doctor Who would have been remiss not to get around to eventually, which is to put its creative tools to work on Doctor Who's own history. This is, in effect, the story where the Williams era finally takes on the Hinchcliffe era and makes its bid to be considered more interesting than the other. It is, in many ways, the Williams era's *Terror of the Zygons*.

The story's biggest problem is that the first two episodes at times try the viewers' patience. In their defense, this is part of the point. First impressions strongly suggest this story is yet another version of the von Däniken horror that was already looking tired last season in *Image of the Fendahl*. About the best that can be said is that the show is finally doing stone circles, which, while a significant and visible omission in the Hinchcliffe era, were more than adequately covered in *Children of the Stones*, a series that, as I argued at the time, should really be considered an honorary part of the Hinchcliffe era.

But even within the first two episodes there are hints of what's going to happen. From the start, it's fairly clear who the villains are. The first episode is a dead-on execution of the formula for this sort of story, with Professor Rumford and Vivien Fay being the obvious allies and de Vries, the maniacal cult leader, being the obvious villain. Virtually nothing in the first episode even hints that the situation could be anything other than the obvious. It's all competently executed, and at only 25 minutes it doesn't particularly try the viewer's patience, but there is very little that's remarkable about it, either. It hits more or less perfectly the exact balance between being good enough to be fun to watch for one episode, but not good enough to sustain for four. So it's a believable and good start and the audience doesn't have to have any clues that this isn't a business-as-usual story. In hindsight the only real clue that anything is amiss is how rubbish a villain de Vries actually is. Given that he is in fact a stooge who gets whacked in the next episode, this is in hindsight telling, but it's a case where the usual frailties of the production create a moment of unexpected cleverness: anyone treating bad acting as a sign of a red herring in the Williams era is going to be wrong a lot more often than right, so what turns out to be an important clue about where the story is really going instead fades into the background.

But in the second episode there is, slowly but surely, a massive change in tone. The key scene is de Vries's death. Miles and Wood refer to this sequence as

one of the most unintentionally funny parts of the story, and to some extent they're right. Certainly one of the key sources of humor, the astonishing ineffectiveness of the Ogri as monsters, does not appear to be deliberate. Fisher had conceived of the Ogiri as stones that transform into rock men and thus walk around, but director Darrol Blake somewhat unwisely opted to turn them into giant moving stones. The result is difficult to capture in words. This is not because it's terribly hard to describe – they're giant polystyrene rocks that glow urine-yellow as they glide around. Rather, it's that the human brain, when faced with such a description, isn't quite capable of generating the full and jaw-dropping weirdness of it on its own, tending instead to hedge and assume that it can't be *that* bad and that any such description must be exaggerating for comic effect. Unfortunately, the reality is that it's pretty much the worst-case scenario for giant urine-colored attack rocks.

And yet despite the atrocious nature of the monsters, somehow the scene works, albeit in what is openly a so-bad-it's-good manner. But what's key is that the scene isn't just a camp disaster that can be loved ironically by geeks who want to pretend they're hipsters. Yes, it's that too, but the way in which it jars the viewer out of the narrative actually has a narrative purpose. The scene is already a transgression against the formula: de Vries, who we had taken to be the major human villain and the public face of the Cailleach, seemed sure to last until at least the end of episode three, if not well into episode four; to have him die in such an utterly ludicrous fashion is oddly effective. It makes the scene function exceedingly well for what it is, forcing the audience to sit up and realize that this is not the story they thought it was.

It's here that we should pause and consider thoroughly the views of one of Doctor Who's most prominent critics, Lawrence Miles. Regular readers of these books may have detected a certain lack of respect for Miles's viewpoints on my part (mingled with a grudging respect for his fiction, which is annoyingly good). This is not entirely inaccurate, and his comments on this story are a fairly succinct demonstration of why. Simply put, I think his account of how narrative works is absurd and that he doesn't actually understand how stories can work other than in one narrow sense. So yes, it's time for another one of those bits where I start getting all narratological.

The crux of Miles's complaints about this story come down to, "It's impossible to relate to." The significance of a living Celtic goddess on Earth is downplayed, the scary bits aren't scary, and the entire idea of the Ogri is ill-conceived. To be fair, none of these three criticisms are wrong as such. The nature of the Cailleach is downplayed, the story isn't very scary (not even the campers scene, much as Tat Wood tries to defend it), and evil rocks that move and suck blood are kind of dumb even before you color them urine-yellow. No, this isn't where Miles completely gets the wrong end of the stick.

Miles's problem is that he cannot conceive of any narrative logic where those things wouldn't matter. The only way in which he is willing to treat a Doctor Who story is via a model where the most interesting question is, "What

happens to the Doctor this week?" There's a great moment in the documentary *The Mindscape of Alan Moore* in which he talks about the progression of his interest in comics, and how as a small boy he was interested in what Superman was doing in a given month, but as he grew up – and by "up" I mean something in the 10-12 range – he became interested in what the writers were doing. This is a fairly normal progression. Mature readership involves moving beyond just blindly investing in characters and into thinking about the work of fiction as what it is, namely a work of fiction.

This doesn't mean that nobody simply invests in the characters and cares about what happens to them. Obviously that happens, most commonly with children. But the idea that reading should be done more childishly and that more developed and mature approaches are bad things is, I think, self-evidently ludicrous. It's not as though reading works of fiction as works of fiction and with active awareness of the use of tropes, conventions, and structure is an emotionless process. After all, Alan Moore shot to the forefront of his field in part because he wrote more emotionally involved comics than anyone else at the time.

But more to the point, understanding long-form serialized media solely in terms of mere investment in the characters is actively the wrong way to go about it. If someone is a regular Doctor Who viewer, especially in 1978 when the show features virtually no long-term character development whatsoever, then they're not watching it out of investment in the characters. They're watching it because they like Doctor Who-type stories. And this is especially true for children's media, which tends to generate a lot of its pleasure from the ritualized and consistent aspects of it. Part of why the Hinchcliffe era was good children's entertainment (where the Hammer films it paid homage to were not) was that even in the Hinchcliffe era there was the basic contract that at the end of the story the Doctor and Sarah were going to be OK. When that's taken as a premise, all the other scares are permissible. Far from working because the audience is invested in what happens to the Doctor, the series works because the audience doesn't have to worry about the Doctor and can just enjoy watching him.

This means that even child viewers are more than capable of enjoying a story based on its subversion of expectations. (Anyone who disbelieves this should go read some picture books. Scads of them are based on subversion of expectations. Idiosyncratically, my go-to example is *The Monster at the End of This Book*, a delightfully good Sesame Street book that, if you've never read it, you really owe it to yourself to track down a copy. There's apparently an iPhone/iPad version.) Sure, children may not go for broad and sweeping postmodernist readings about subversion of past eras of Doctor Who, but even they will get that the story's got a dummy villain and that it's a surprise when the narrative jumps to a spaceship. And anyway, one of postmodernism's stock techniques is applying childlike logic to adult things. So postmodernism for children is, far from an impossible thing on the basis that they supposedly relate to things

because they think they're real, actually dead simple. You can have emotionally real relationships with postmodern things. Just ask my ex-wife, much as I'm sure she wishes she hadn't.

And yet Miles inexplicably rejects this entire avenue of reading, insisting that there must be some vaguely defined notion of coherence and suspense for the story to have any resonance, and that the suspense must rest on the idea that something bad could happen to the Doctor. He's not wrong that that's an effective means of suspense. There's a bit of *The Leisure Hive* that he quite rightly praises to high heaven because it makes the sudden and unexpected turn of putting Baker's Doctor in a position of real vulnerability. But that's not the only way to do it, any more than having the Doctor be all emo about Rose is the only way to do emotional storytelling. Just because it works doesn't mean that other things don't.

In fact, an overwhelming majority of viewers are quite capable of getting invested in the narratology of a story and trying to outthink the writers. Yes, there have to be other things like characters that are fun to watch, but the Williams era, particularly once it gets the double act of the Doctor and Romana going, has that in spades. If there's one thing that the rise in recent years of procedurals like *Bones*, *Castle*, and, yes, *Sherlock* has shown it's that a good double act and some inventive plot twists really are sufficient to entrance a massive audience. In this regard, the Williams era has aged particularly well, better in many ways than even the Hinchcliffe era. It's perfectly serviceable television by standards thirty years out from when it was made. But even by the standards of its time, it works. In a world where *Star Wars*, *FawltyTowers*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* all work, this isn't too far ahead of its time.

So this really is a titanically large blind spot for Miles. Especially because this blind spot leads him to reject the bulk of the Williams era. In terms of this story, it causes him to miss a key fact: that the apparent weaknesses of the story are in fact the point. The entire structure of *The Stones of Blood* is based on the fact that it starts out looking like an extremely familiar story structure, then making an about-face to become a different story structure, all without overstaying its welcome. And, more importantly, it becomes a story structure that's markedly more fun. This is very much a story about the Williams era showing that it has more fun than the Hinchcliffe era ever did, and it just about gets away with it.

At the heart of this are the Megara, essentially a pair of flying judicial fairy lights who end up putting the Doctor on trial for more or less arbitrary and capricious reasons. This gives Baker an episode's worth of time to do one of the things his Doctor is absolutely best at, which is to browbeat stupid authority figures. And the entire sequence just sings. It's delightful, particularly as the Megara become increasingly frustrated with him. (For my money, the real highlight is that the Doctor has a barrister's wig handy, which is one of the funniest uses of the recurring joke that Baker's Doctor has all manner of bewildering things in his pockets.)

The problem, and it's a significant one, is with the B-story. Not that it's

bad. Beatrix Lehmann, in her last television role, lights up the screen as Professor Rumford, and the sequence of her, Romana, and K-9 figuring out what planet Vivien is from via recipe books (a sequence gently appropriated by Russell T. Davies for the Slitheen) is absolutely delightful, doubly so if you've caught the lesbian subtext between Rumford and Vivien and can fully appreciate the domestics of the situation. The only problem is that instead of having them show up just in time to save the day after the Doctor has run out of tricks to delay things, they show up after the Doctor has already solved it and proven to the Megara who Vivien is. Which makes the entire sequence pointless. And it's not as though it needed to be. Successfully running rings around the Megara for long enough that Romana and Rumford could solve the mystery would have been a fine accomplishment for the Doctor. Instead he gets the entire victory and the supporting cast is left irrelevant, a troubling instance of Baker hogging all the oxygen of a story. At this point it's not even something he consciously or rudely does. It's simply how he plays the part. Writing for Baker's Doctor in this era just demands putting him at the center of everything. This, not his lack of vulnerability, is at the heart of many of this era's actual narrative troubles. It's not that nothing bad ever happens to Baker, it's that he demands so much of the narrative focus that it's hard for anyone else to get in on the action.

But this gets at the nature of Romana, which is worth commenting on as she is a uniquely popular companion (though moreso in her next incarnation). Williams – and to his credit, Hinchcliffe moved in this direction as well with Leela – favors companions who are capable of winning audience affection in the same way the Doctor does. Romana is as capable as the Doctor at always finding something to try. (And on the rare occasions that the script gives her nothing to do she at least goes for a decent laugh by looking irritated and like she's stalling for time through scenes and then, when the Doctor inevitably shows up, delivering the line "Oh Doctor" as if relieved that she doesn't have to keep carrying on a conversation with the bore of the party.) It doesn't always work, but it's a savvy choice – so much so that the ability to always find some new thing to try in a situation becomes a mainstay of companions from here on out. Previous companions were often resourceful. But after Romana, a good companion is defined by being as irrepressible as the Doctor without being quite as clever. It's just unfortunate that right now she has to be to stand up to the lead's chokehold on the narrative focus. And even still, he might marginalize her right out of the plot.

But this defect aside, what we have here is quite charming. It's a genuinely enjoyable subversion of the by now tired standbys of the Hinchcliffe era that goes into some of the most fun Doctor Who has ever had being anti-authoritarian, and with a new sort of authority figure. We haven't seen the Doctor do the legal system in a while. It's also another nice step in the larger anti-epic, thanks to the Megara. The Megara are, after all, keepers of justice, and what is justice if not the maintaining of fairness and balance? And, of course, the Megara are shown to be ridiculously blinkered and silly, striking another blow

against the basic assumptions of the Key to Time.

There's also an increasingly clear counter-narrative about the Key. Not only has every segment been stolen and, in being stolen, thrown something out of balance and into chaos or confusion, but furthermore there is an increasing theme of the segments being, for lack of a better word (or perhaps just because I really like this word) mercurial. Both the second and third segments have actively had shape-changing powers, and the first segment, more broadly considered, is effectively a tool to cause vast social upheaval. (Unlike the second and third segments, where their theft causes chaos because of the absence of the segment from its proper context, the first segment causes chaos by its presence.) The ethics of this story arc are far from being about the proper balance of forces, but about the need to upend rigid definitions of the world. Not destroy, but challenge and unsettle. In this regard the ornate structure of *The Ribos Operation* even reiterates the structure of the larger arc, which subverts rigid categories through an aesthetic of postmodern play that demonstrates the very subversion it praises. Neat.

Not a Time-Travelling Shape-Shifting Robot Operated by Miniaturized Cross People (*The Androids of Tara*)

It's November 21, 1978. The Boomtown Rats are still at number one with "Rat Trap," which should probably get at least some serious mention as it is, at least according to Wikipedia, which is, as we all know, never wrong about anything, the first punk/new wave song to hit #1. In any case, my life gets simpler a week later when Rod Stewart hits number one with "Da Ya Think I'm Sexy," a song that is really pretty unambiguous in all regards. A week later it's Boney M with a version of "Mary's Boy Child," which stays in place through the end of the story. Blondie, The Cars, Sarah Brightman, The Bee Gees, Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond, and the Village People (with "YMCA") also get into the top ten. In the lower reaches of the chart are The Buzzcocks, The Clash, Elvis Costello, and most interestingly for our purposes (and nobody else's), Mankind with "Dr Who," a version of the Doctor Who theme song, which makes it as high as 25.

In real news, Harvey Milk is murdered by Dan White. The *Times* halts publication for nearly a year due to labor problems, which is the sort of thing you'd normally like to mock Rupert Murdoch for, except he buys the paper in the fallout from these problems so still has nothing to do with it. Next time, Mr. Murdoch, I will not be so lenient. Also, the Spanish Constitution is established, officially restoring democracy to Spain.

While on television we have the start of the back half of the Key to Time arc. Thus far there's been a lot to like about the Key to Time arc. Not to get too far ahead of ourselves, but this is not going to really hold true for the remainder of it. The nature of presenting these essays in chronological order necessarily makes this seem like a failing, and in a kind of strange way. Had the season run backwards we would be talking about how the season went from a rocky start to a strong finish, and it would look like the whole thing was a winner. But because it's the ending that's off the whole season ends up looking weak.

We'll talk more about this and why it's rather silly over the next two stories, of course, but for now I want to point out up front that this is where things start going a bit wrong. But before we get into that, let's quickly deal with what this story is. It's fairly simple – it's a parody of *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Tara is a planet with androids and advanced technology that has, for no particularly discernible reason, taken on a social structure that almost exactly matches that of a Ruritanian Romance. All of this sounds cynical, and it is a bit. Certainly it's tough

not to see moving from a trio of complex multi-layered narratives to a straight pastiche as a bit of a move down, at least in some sense. This is, notably, the part of the Key to Time arc with the fewest thematic similarities with the larger story. The segment is shamelessly a pointless MacGuffin this time, a random bit of a statue that then gets taken by the bad guys and doesn't even influence the plot after the first episode.

But all of this ignores the fact that it's really quite well done. It's a period piece that's right up the BBC's alley, the addition of Tom Baker to the proceedings is genuinely fun, Grendel is a hoot as a villain (and his last line is phenomenal), and there's a delightful cleverness to the whole thing. Taken on its own merits it is solidly enjoyable. Only the Key to Time stuff makes it a weak choice to show a non-fan looking for something idly entertaining. It's really only in terms of the three stories that came before it and what the Williams era has been shooting for lately that it seems lackluster. And yet for all of that, this is actually one of the better reviewed and more acclaimed stories of the season – indeed, fan polls tend to put it ahead of the first two stories. This is worth exploring, because it gets at the heart of the weird critical reception of this era of Doctor Who.

There are, of course, plenty of criteria by which *The Androids of Tara* is a much stronger story than, say, *The Ribos Operation*. It is, after all, a well-done story. It may be a very simple reskinning of a classic novel, but with the exception of a truly bizarre monster early on in the episode it's one of the few Graham Williams-era stories where the shrinking budgets and panicked production circumstances never really show through on screen. It's a swashbuckling costume drama made up of a series of big set pieces, and swashbuckling costume drama is something the BBC can do really well.

There is, however, something more than a little strange about this approach, especially in 2014. With a handful of exceptions like *Underworld*, there are relatively few Doctor Who stories where the technical qualities of the production really grind things to a halt. This was not always true, even of the same stories. In their original context, as one-off transmissions that might be revisited someday via the novelizations, it's easy to see why a well-made bit of lightweight fun would come off better than the irony-laden complexity of *The Pirate Planet*.

For the most part *TARDIS Eruditorum* takes the context of transmission fairly seriously. But equally, I've always engaged in a sort of detailed close-reading that simply wasn't possible on first transmission of these stories. The question of what actually happened on the days that a story transmitted is always an important one, but faux wear and tear on the book covers aside, I've never pretended this project was written in the eras it covers.

And perhaps more to the point, I'm deeply skeptical of attempts to watch stories as though it's the year of transmission. It's not 1978 anymore, and attempts to pretend that it is seem to me necessarily doomed. Crucially, this means that even a well-made 1978 television production like *The Androids of Tara*

exists at something of an aesthetic remove. I'm never hugely fond of the idea that we can watch television while forgetting that it's fictional and constructed, but when watching something that's visibly old it becomes even harder not to see the artifice of it. Given this, "well made for 1978" is, perhaps, not as important as "contains interesting and provocative ideas that reward multiple viewings."

To mix a metaphor, however, this is not the only viewpoint in the sea. As we've seen in previous volumes, an awful lot of fan consensus about stories was shaped in the 1980s. And as we're going to see over the rest of this volume, for a variety of reasons the Williams era was not well liked by The Powers That Be within 80s fandom. The main line of critique is that the stories were "silly" and poorly made. Much of this criticism is born of memories of first transmission. The 80s fans who slammed the Williams era were, by and large, driven by active memories of the disappointment of watching it. Given this, *The Androids of Tara* is an obvious choice for a story that would stick out as a good one. It's not overtly silly and it's pretty well made.

There is, however, one wrinkle in suggesting that the Williams era's strength is conceptual complexity, which is Tom Baker. Because Baker, as he's playing the role at this point, works much better in the set-pieces approach than he does in the more conceptual approach. So much of the show at this point is bound up in the pleasure of watching Tom Baker. And this goes beyond the series being a star vehicle. It's not just that Baker mugs for the camera and dominates every scene he's in. It's that he does nothing else anymore. This is almost painfully clear in this story, where he begins by (relatively amusingly) deciding that this adventure isn't worth his time and that he's going to go fishing. His involvement in the action is entirely reactive: he either wants to save Romana or he's being threatened.

Admittedly the Doctor has been a reluctant hero in plenty of eras, but there's something different to it here. The Doctor may be reluctant to help at first, but he generally finds his way into being invested in the adventure eventually. At this point, however, Baker never moves off audience-pleasing cleverness. It's all he does. This isn't necessarily a disaster. Baker is, in fact, audience-pleasing and clever. But by its nature it works better when the story is also just a string of entertaining moments than it does when there's something serious trying to go on under the surface. When the center of the show doesn't care about anything more than individual moments of cleverness, the show is fighting a losing battle with gravity if it doesn't as well.

This sets up a larger critique of the Williams era. For all the brilliance that goes on in these stories, the whole is often markedly less than the sum of its parts. Even *The Ribos Operation*, which I loved, doesn't quite live up to all of its potential.

So yes, this is fun. We haven't had a good identical duplicate since *The Enemy of the World*, and there's a bit of clever cheek in doing a duplicates story that also has android doubles. Mary Tamm ends up with four separate roles in

the story, which is oddly charming. And it is all entertaining and fun. But if you want more than just entertaining and fun, this story is going to be a let-down after the previous three. And if all you want is entertaining and fun then there's the troubling fact that almost all of the success of this story comes from one-off ideas that can't usefully be repeated – the show can't do swashbuckling costume drama ripoffs of classic novels every month. In the end, this is a good story, but it's just not easy to feel very good about. For the first time in a while the whole is actually greater than the sum of its parts, but there's an uncomfortable sense that it only accomplished that by avoiding trying to add up to too much in the first place.

A Big Mining Thing (*The Power of Kroll*)

It's Christmas Adam, 1978. Boney M still holds at number one with "Mary's Boy Child." Two weeks later they're unseated by The Village People with "YMCA," which stays for the last week of the story as well. All of this marks the clear ascendency of disco as a subculture, which, given the case that, historically speaking, Doctor Who has uncannily tracked the tone of youth subculture, is reason enough for concern. In any case, Earth, Wind, and Fire, Elton John, and the Bee Gees also chart.

While in real news, Vietnam makes a major attack on the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Spain ratifies its new Constitution. And there's a big UN/UNICEF push for the "Year of the Child" featuring a concert with ABBA, the Bee Gees, Donna Summer, and Rod Stewart. So that's horrific.

While on television, it's not a popular story at all. Let us be honest, for a moment, about the critical consensus regarding *The Power of Kroll*. Its weaknesses are evident, yes. It's a bold fan who can defend the Swampies or the way in which Kroll is merged into shots. (The Kroll model itself is actually phenomenal, and it's easy to see why his first appearance was an iconic moment for children of the time. On the other hand, the join between the two shots is an abomination.) But these in and of themselves don't explain this story's status as a punching bag, nor does the fact that it drags a bit.

No, the biggest problem this story has is that for a Robert Holmes script it's complete and utter crap. It is, in fact, by fan consensus the second worst Robert Holmes script, second only to the much maligned *The Space Pirates*, which is actually not a poor choice to compare this one to.

Both, after all, have essentially the same origin. Holmes was called in to produce a script in a hurry to fill a gap. And in both cases he was given a thoroughly crappy set of instructions for his troubles. For *The Space Pirates* he was told to tack on two extra episodes and be sure to keep the science realistic. This time he got told to cut down on the humor and to insert the biggest monster in Doctor Who history. And in both cases the resulting script amounts to Robert Holmes writing a space Western. (Also, in a more esoteric coincidence, *The Space Pirates* was the first story on which John Nathan-Turner worked, then as a floor assistant. *The Power of Kroll*, on the other hand, was the first story produced by him, as Graham Williams, depending on your choice of sources, went on vacation or took ill, leaving Nathan-Turner as the de facto producer.)

And in both cases the result is similar. When I covered *The Space Pirates* I suggested that to a heavy degree there was much that was unknowable about the story – not only was it paced in a way that would only work in 1969, it was so visual that it would be impossible to understand only from the extant audio

track. And I stand by that. I don't think there's another story with quite as much information missing as *The Space Pirates*. But were I to take a guess on what we'd conclude if we had all six parts of *The Space Pirates*, I'd guess that we'd basically get Robert Holmes giving the show and, if we're being uncharitable, the audience the middle finger. Simply put, *The Space Pirates* gives the strong sense at times that Robert Holmes is just going, "You want realistic space action, I'll give you realistic space action: long stretches of NOTHING HAPPENING."

Here there is a similar sense of irritation. Even the basic idea of the story has a whiff of cynicism to it. A cowboys and Indians-style western set in a swamp. Tat Wood, in what may be the single most psychologically revealing moment in the whole of *About Time*, asks, "What other programme would give you a western in a swamp?" as if this were some sort of mark of distinction or a reason to like this story, but for those of us who are not Tat Wood the fact remains that this is not a combination that really sells itself.

Instead, one gets the acute impression that Holmes just didn't care about this script beyond how it let him work in his biggest fart joke ever. (The reason the refinery is producing so much methane is Kroll's "feeding processes.") It's hardly the first or the last story to simply be packed with Doctor Who standards – indeed, it's not even the last Robert Holmes story to do that. But there's a density to the standards, and a sense that they're an older-fashioned set of standards than usual. The space-western parallel with *The Space Pirates* is only the start. There's a distinct air of base-under-siege to the proceedings here, and the sequences where Kroll's tentacles begin bursting out of pipes in the refinery is more than slightly evocative of *Fury from the Deep*. The plot throws in captures and escapes like they're going out of style. And conceptually the whole thing is basically just *The Mutants* only without the flurry of clever ideas that characterizes a Baker and Martin script.

And that, I think, is the crux of this story's reputation: the fact that it's just depressing to watch a Robert Holmes story and compare it unfavorably to a Baker and Martin story. But that comparison also captures, I think, why the reputation isn't quite fair, because if it weren't for the increased expectations that come along with the name "Robert Holmes" much of this story would be easier to forgive. The exact same story transmitted under Baker and Martin's names would, I think, rank as one of their best.

Even if people prefer to focus on the story's deficiencies, there's a lot to, if not love, at least enjoy here. The cast is surprisingly good, with both Philip Madoc (who is, to the frustration of both actor and audience, wasted in something of a bit part) and John Abineri involved. Martin Jarvis was supposed to be there too, and it's almost a relief he dropped out, in part because it means John Leeson gets to appear in the flesh, and in part because blowing that many great actors on a story this mediocre would be painful. The directing is mostly solid. The Swampies are a wreck, but it's not like the script gave anybody much more to go on. As I said, the Kroll model itself is actually quite good. It's not much harder to put it on and have a fun two hours than it was with *The Androids*

of Tara.

It's just that so much of what stands between it and quality is so… contemptuous. Watching it, there is the continuous sense that the writer is looking down on you for enjoying it. Certainly *he* isn't enjoying it. Even the story's moral point is half-hearted and cynical. It's an anti-colonialist parable that can't muster up much more than, "Homicidal savages with funny skin probably shouldn't be subject to genocide."

To Holmes's credit, he apparently recognized that this script was weak. Indeed, he seems to have taken it as a sign that it was time to step away from the program, of which, at this point, he's contributed to ten of the last eleven seasons. Although he does eventually decide to make a return and contribute another three-and-a-half stories, he did intend his exit after this to be permanent, and given the sheer depth of his contributions to the program, that fact speaks volumes.

Unfortunately, few of the volumes it speaks are particularly good for the show. For the first of two times the program is finding itself put in an impossible position by the BBC. On the one hand it has a mandate to move away from darker and more intense subjects. This is never a good thing to ask of Doctor Who, but at least the program does have one fallback available when this happens – the impish mockery Holmes and Adams have done so much to develop. But not for the last time that leg has also been kicked out from under the program with demands from on high that the program tone down the humor. So the program can neither be funny nor serious. That doesn't really leave it with much else that it can be.

And that's the crux of the problem. Mocking humor works well enough as a fallback, but falling back from that lands you uncomfortably close to out-and-out nihilism. An anti-epic can be made to work if it's at least a cutting commentary on the normal system of values for epic storytelling. And at the start of this season, at least, we had that. *The Ribos Operation* was, at the end of the day, a compelling story about the power of the marginal and abject. *The Pirate Planet* was a sobering reminder of the existence of genuine moral abominations. But this? This is just a western in a swamp done because the writer was pissed off. It's not an inversion of the normal values of a sci-fi epic. It's just a willful refusal to do it well in favor of doing it with some backhanded jokes.

And this exposes a very big problem with even the best account of the Williams era. For all that it has come up with a variety of means to subvert and upend the established order, it's not clear what it actually does believe in. In this regard, its intermittent paralleling of punk is wholly active. This is a period that is about a diffuse and not entirely well-targeted anger, with no particular sense of a solution, let alone the desire to fix it, either.

But no, even punk was relatively clear on the fact that it had it in for the establishment. No such clarity seems to exist for the Williams era. What is it that it's defying? What exactly is it mocking? None of the answers are particularly compelling. No, worse than that, the answers are reasonably compelling, they

just don't say anything good about the program. Is it mocking everything? If so, then there's an uncomfortable nihilism. Is it mocking anything it can outsmart? That's just bullying for people with high IQs. Rigidity? Conformity? Then this story and the one before it, which are just straight-down-the-line thrill-by-numbers affairs wouldn't make sense, or if they did, would have to be taken as mocking the audience for going along with it.

In a way, of course, we're just reiterating the dilemma from the end of the Troughton era: the realization that tearing it all down is not a viable end in of itself and that separation from the world is not intrinsically noble. In fact, this is in one sense the original dilemma of Doctor Who – the animating spirit of the Doctor's plot arc in the earliest episodes. And now it roars up again.

But this time there is something altogether more troubling about it. The fact that the program has deteriorated to the point where Robert Holmes gives up on it cannot be taken as a good thing. Yes, this story is entertaining. Considerably more entertaining, in fact, than most people give it credit for. And I've never been willing to fault Doctor Who for being "merely" entertaining. But on the other hand, that's always been because it was other things at other times. At this point it is becoming increasingly and unnervingly possible that all the show is for is light entertainment; for the first time in memory it's becoming very difficult to formulate a decent answer to the question of what Doctor Who is for beyond that. There's a real sense that it's just about the man in the scarf, his witty and attractive sidekick, and the tin dog.

And this story doesn't even have the tin dog.

Only Ashes (*The Armageddon Factor*)

It's January 20th, 1979. The Village People remain at #1 with "YMCA." One week later they're unseated by Ian and the Blockheads' "Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick," which I assume, especially based on what else is popular, is sort of like Lady Gaga's Disco Stick. That's all over in a week as Blondie hits number one with "Heart of Glass," which, I mean, good for Blondie, but it's one of the most brazen sell-outs of any talented musician ever. Regardless, it sees out the season. Olivia Newton-John, Funkadelic, Chaka Khan, ABBA, Leif Garrett, The Bee Gees, Elvis Costello, and Gloria Gaynor all also chart.

In real news, now is the winter of our discontent, but we'll talk about that in the next essay. Lesser news includes Brenda Ann Spencer opening fire on a school in San Diego because of her dislike of Mondays. Patty Hearst is released from prison on the same day that Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Tehran from exile, which just about sums up the Carter administration. Ten days later Khomeini takes power in Iran, leading to nothing but sunshine and bunnies for decades to come. Pluto nips inside Neptune's orbit to let Neptune become the outermost planet. This remains so until 1999, at which point Pluto becomes the outermost planet again. Neptune, of course, is horribly jealous about this and plots political moves (including a scheme to strip Pluto of its planetary status) to retake the position more permanently, but that's more of a Tennant-era story. It snows in the Sahara Desert for half an hour, China invades Vietnam, and St. Lucia becomes independent from the UK.

While on television, the Key to Time concludes with neither a bang nor a whimper. But before we look too closely at that, let's take a step back and examine the arc as a whole one more time, and more generally the Williams era to date. The central critical dilemma with the Williams era is straightforward enough: is it a witty and lively postmodern rendition of the tropes of science fiction, or is it just a bunch of cynical hacks mocking the show they're supposed to be making?

Both of these, of course, overstate their case. The former, admittedly, is not nearly as impishly brilliant as Gareth Roberts' summary of that case as viewing the era as "an artefact of postmodern forces combining to produce works of semiotic thickness through usage of meta-textual signifiers." The latter, on the other hand, might actually be too nice. The same Roberts piece provides a damning account of the practical origins of the anti-Williams camp.

Not to leaf too many pages ahead, but there are only five more transmitted stories in the Williams era after this one. After that begins the nine-season tenure of John Nathan-Turner as producer – a tenure that defies easy classification as a single era (indeed, for our purposes it'll be split over three books). Nathan-Turner's contributions to the program are far too complex to square away in what amounts to an introductory note. But one of the more sickening aspects of

the era is the way in which Nathan-Turner presented himself as providing a glorious rebirth for the show and unabashedly threw Williams – his previous employer, keep in mind – under the bus to do it.

To fully understand this, however, one has to also understand what we may as well call the fan-industrial complex that came into being in the Nathan-Turner era. Again, we'll deal with the contours of this more specifically in future entries, but one thing that happened under Nathan-Turner was that the show overtly refocused on courting its more obsessive fans. One hallmark of this was the retaining of Ian Levine, a particularly high-profile fan, as an unofficial advisor for the program. The result described by Roberts presents a grim spectacle: fanzines that include a dartboard of Graham Williams alongside a positive review of *Time-Flight*, and a guidebook to the famous Longleat convention in which Ian Levine savages the Williams era before praising "the new golden age" that he's quietly moonlighting for. Meanwhile, Eric Saward, the then-current script editor, accused the Williams era of insulting the audience while Nathan-Turner talked up how he had fixed and improved the program.

This is something that any critical assessment of the Williams era simply has to come to terms with. The bulk of the arguments against Williams came out of a period where fandom had a badly incestuous relationship with the people making the program and where the people making the program had an active interest in marginalizing their predecessors. It's nearly impossible to look at this raft of criticism and not be slightly sickened by it. (Ironically, the hit jobs on Nathan-Turner will eventually, of course, become equally indefensible.)

If nothing else, then, we need to, in looking at the Williams era, make sure that we distinguish between pissing off a set of Doctor Who fans doing official and quasi-official publications in the 80s and actually being bad. Though they're deeply imperfect numbers, it's worth turning to the AI figures here. For those unaware of how British ratings work, in addition to getting audience figures British ratings have an "appreciation index," which basically polls a chunk of the audience to ask if they liked the program. These numbers are, of course, imperfect, measuring only an immediate reaction as opposed to any larger critical judgment. They are also sporadic: for some of the seasons in question we have only eight data points. And there's a further trend whereby the numbers improve in general over time, making it difficult to use AI to compare different eras.

That said, the average AI for Hinchcliffe's last season was 59. Williams's three seasons got 62, 64, and 65 respectively. John Nathan-Turner's first season got 63. So clearly whatever one might say about the Williams era, suggesting that it is in some way obviously bad is a stretch. The obvious counter-argument here is that popularity isn't equivalent to quality, but frankly, that's just not true. Popularity is unambiguously equivalent to quality. It's just not the only form of quality, nor is it necessarily the best form of quality.

So it's clear enough that the audience at large didn't feel disrespected by the Williams era and didn't view it as a cratering failure compared with the eras on either side of it. This alone is grounds to moderate any criticism of the era. But

all we've done here is avoid the most savage criticisms of the era. That doesn't mean we have to like it. I mean, the Letts era was popular and is even quite beloved by fans, unlike the relatively contentious Williams era. But in many ways it came up short here at *TARDIS Eruditorum*.

Actually, the Letts era is in many ways an apt comparison. Both the Williams era and the Letts era suffer largely from the fact that it's not entirely clear everyone involved is making the same show. But where the Letts era had two competing aesthetics – glam rock pastiche and serious-minded military action – the Williams era runs into the problem where it's never quite clear whether the show is engaged in good-natured satire that's aware of its own technical limitations or whether it's just given up on the idea that it can possibly be good and is just being bitter about it. Or, to put it another way, it's never quite clear whether the program is doing the best it can under trying circumstances or whether it's just going through the motions.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Key to Time arc, which, as discussed, is very much a game of two halves, with the first half containing three edgy and innovative stories and the back half being characterized by egregious conceptual laziness. And in many ways, this story is the one that's left holding the bag for that. It may not be quite as aggressively low concept as *The Power of Kroll*, but any discussion of the lackluster finish of the Key to Time must, ultimately, center on *The Armageddon Factor*.

The biggest problem here manifests before the first shot. We praised *The Ribos Operation* for having the good sense to hire Robert Holmes to tackle the difficult job of starting the Key to Time off. In the same spirit, then, it is difficult to feel anything but dismay at the decision to hire Bob Baker and Dave Martin to write the conclusion of the arc. There is really no way to look at this decision and come to a good conclusion. There are two possible interpretations, both of them appalling. The first is that Williams and Read looked back on *The Invisible Enemy* and *Underworld* and thought that the writing there was of a high enough quality to serve as the climax to the entire Key to Time epic. This implies that neither Williams nor Read have anything resembling a sense of taste. The alternative is that Williams and Read had a more or less accurate sense of how good Baker and Martin are (i.e. not) and simply didn't care.

Either way, those who feel as though there's something a bit cynical about the Williams era have little ammunition more compelling than this story. It beggars belief that anyone could possibly think that Baker and Martin are an appropriate choice for wrapping up an epic like this. And sure enough, they blow it in several key regards. The problem is simple enough: they display no sense whatsoever that they see the Key to Time as anything unique in the world of sci-fi epics. They think they're writing *Star Wars* for the BBC. Which is, of course, exactly what *The Ribos Operation* pointedly avoided doing.

On the other hand, what made the Key to Time so interesting at the outset was that it was an anti-epic in which the grandiose scale was revealed as a lie that served to erase the individual, whereas here we have grandiose epic-by-numbers.

The epitome of this is the Marshall, a character so ham-handedly stupid that it's difficult to know what to say. When Baker and Martin first turned up on the scene in *The Claws of Axos* we had to bend over backwards to defend these sort of pig-headed caricature characters in terms of the overall aesthetic of the Pertwee era. Simply put, the Pertwee era worked by putting programmatic characters in situations where their single note was inappropriate, then sitting back to enjoy the results.

But look, it's not 1971 anymore. The Axos approach could be justified in the Glam era when the play of visually arresting images in color was a novel thing for television to be doing. However, attempting the play of visually arresting images on a BBC budget after *Star Wars* is... not going to work. (Eventually new opportunities for spectacle will, of course, open up, but *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps* isn't out yet.) And even if it did work, the people who are going to make it work aren't going to be Baker and Martin, who haven't actually had a new idea in years. In hindsight their biggest successes came on the backs of good decisions by the design department in what was one of the golden ages of design in Doctor Who. *The Claws of Axos* didn't work because the writing was full of good ideas; it worked because the design department turned out aliens made of lurid yellows and oranges that looked like nothing else on television at the time.

In 1979, with visuals that are competent but not uncanny, these programmatic characters just look like Baker and Martin can't be bothered to write characters and so have decided on ludicrous clichés instead. We may as well just check them off. Cackling malevolence of a villain? Check. Evil computer? Check. Thinly veiled Cold War metaphor about mutually assured destruction? Yep. And we're not even in a particularly exciting moment of the Cold War! I mean, this is détente and we're doing evil computers and mutually assured destruction. There's next to nothing interesting being said here except "BIG EPIC THINGS GO BOOM!"

The worst and most crushing moment of this is when the Shadow proclaims himself to be "the shadow that accompanies you all," a moment of staggering breadth that seems, just for a moment, to hint at the idea that he's the literal embodiment of the Jungian shadow or something. Then he cackles a bunch and engages in more schemes that make the Master look clever.

All of which said, the summary offered by Miles and Wood in *About Time* is thoroughly apropos: it's not a complete disaster, which is better than one has any right to expect from the circumstances. Like *The Androids of Tara*, with which this story shares a director, the production is solid enough to elevate the script. This is the best war-ravaged hellhole since *Genesis of the Daleks*, with scads of atmosphere. The Shadow is an appallingly written villain, but his skull mask is genuinely unsettling and does tremendous amounts to get the character to punch above his weight. The occasional howlers crop up, sure, but for the most part the production manages to get the visuals on message in a way that Doctor Who of late has had problems with.

On top of that, Baker and Martin, for all their myriad faults, catch something of a break here with the material. Yes, this is a hackneyed cod-epic mess, but it's got just enough scope that, combined with the on-target visuals, it manages to get a decent bit of swagger going. On top of that, in amidst the clichés, Baker and Martin do get a few clever ideas in. The fake segment of the Key is a relatively inspired use of the MacGuffin, having the sixth segment be one of the major supporting characters is charming, and the slowly stretching time loop is compelling and clever, with the visual of scenes slowly but surely playing out at greater and greater length being quite good. All of it adds up to give the story enough punch to keep it from cratering, which, let's be fair, was a real possibility for an end-of-season Graham Williams effort penned by Baker and Martin. This absolutely had to be leagues better than, say, *The Invasion of Time*, and in that regard, mission accomplished.

But while this is surprisingly good for the BBC producing a sci-fi epic in 1979, it's much harder to treat it as an acceptable conclusion to the storyline set up by *The Ribos Operation*. *The Ribos Operation* was full of ambiguities and nuances about the nature of the Guardians and balance. Here, however, the Doctor is treated straightforwardly as a servant of the White Guardian, with the Shadow being portrayed as his counterpart for the Black Guardian. All notions of balance are just out the window, with the White Guardian being the straightforward good guy and the Black Guardian being the straightforward bad guy.

On the other hand, it's easy to make too much of this. There's an instinctive tendency to put a lot of weight on the endings of things, such that the fact of *The Armageddon Factor*'s mediocrity counts for more than the fact of *The Ribos Operation*'s splendor. This is not entirely fair, and especially not if one takes seriously the ethos we identified in the first half of the season, whereby the point of the exercise was the subversion of rigid categories. If the order of stories were reversed, it would seem straightforward to praise the season for elevating a banal military sci-fi epic into postmodern genius, and yet the season's aggregate quality would still be the same. More valuable than judging the Key to Time as a success or a failure is the simple observation that it's terribly uneven.

This leaves an uncomfortable sense that the Williams era is an era where extraordinarily good stories can happen, but where they happen almost by accident. Even within this story there's that sense. It's difficult to understand how a story that can produce ideas as compelling as the fake segment of the Key or the time loop can also have a thirty-second sequence of K-9 making modem noises at a door or, more appallingly, Drax. It's difficult to understand how a production team that created *The Ribos Operation* and *The Pirate Planet* could possibly think that this was an acceptable way to wrap it all up. One starts to get the sense that when the series has worked this season it's been because one or two people have shown up and put in a heroic effort.

Unfortunately, of the ones who have, most will shortly be out the door, if they aren't already. Robert Holmes is already gone. The director who salvaged this and made *The Androids of Tara* sing has exactly one more story to his name.

Mary Tamm, who redeemed more than one terrible moment with judicious applications of winks at the audience, is gone (and once again with Williams not bothering to write in a decent companion departure because he wrongly convinced himself he could get the actress to come back). John Leeson, who gave a certain charm to K-9 even at his worst moments, is gone.

This leaves only three people who have a demonstrable knack for quality sticking around. The first is Tom Baker, who brings his own host of problems these days, but who is still magnetically watchable. The second is David Fisher, who penned two solidly competent scripts this season, and who works on the next two seasons as well. The third, however, requires a note about one more departure that took place with this story, namely that of Baker and Martin, who opted to dissolve their writing partnership with this story. This meant that rewrites needed to be done by the script editor. But the script editor, Anthony Read, was out the door at the end of this as well, which meant that much of the final scene had to be written by his incoming replacement. That replacement, of course, is Douglas Adams.

Truth be told, one can tell – and that fact goes a long way towards salvaging *The Armageddon Factor* as a conclusion. The final TARDIS scene is wildly better written than anything that comes before it, shot through with the sense of ambiguity and skepticism towards the Key to Time that characterized the early days of the arc. Adams (unsurprisingly given his own beliefs) seems wholly skeptical of the very idea of gods and absolute power, and there's the strong sense that the Doctor's shattering of the key is done not just to screw up the Black Guardian's plans but to screw up the entire process. Notably, no attention whatsoever is paid to the idea that the Key apparently needs to be given to the White Guardian. Instead, having spent all season building the Key to Time, the Doctor and Romana decide to destroy it before anyone can use it.

Crucially, this is a marked change from earlier in the story. When the Doctor and Romana lash together the fake key they seem downright cheery about being "gods for an hour or two," a marked contrast with the Doctor's visible horror and fear at the idea of absolute power in the end. It's a moment that highlights just how out of sync with each other Adams/Holmes and Baker/Martin are. But it's also quite marvelous, and just about lands this awkward and kludged-together mess of an "epic."

To use the season's own metaphor of balance, the ambition of the first half of the season and the laziness of the second seem to perfectly balance the Key to Time arc between a transcendent brilliance that redeems the frailties of the Williams era and the epitome of those exact frailties. The last scene, at least, manages to tip the balance to where the season is, at least, an exercise in flawed genius. But by this point it is already too late to imagine that the Williams era is going to be a moment of soaring creative genius for the series.

So, for the first time, we're now tracking a series that's not reliably an iconic part of the culture, but that instead falls slightly out of step with it, failing to make its mark. But those missteps, however maddeningly frequent they may

be, don't take away from the fact that when the series does get it right it's as transcendent as it ever has been. Flawed genius is still genius, for better or for worse.

Time Can Be Rewritten (*The Auntie Matter*)

Of all the people producing ancillary Doctor Who material, Big Finish is the most fascinatingly pathological. Although they briefly had something of a mandate to be considered the "real" version of Doctor Who, since the return of the series to television they've become a massive idiosyncrasy. Their business model is built on the appeal of careful and meticulous imitation of the basic form of classic Doctor Who, to the point of making audio adventures with strict formatting into four roughly half-hour episodes with cliffhangers, despite the fact that they release said adventures as CDs/downloads that are listened to in one shot. They demonstrate very little interest in trying out new writers, despite being in many ways an ideal forum for that. Instead they churn out a vast quantity of product that seems to be targeted at people who think the classic series was better than the new series.

Once they finally got Tom Baker on board to do a series of audios for them, this changed only slightly. The Fourth Doctor Adventures line is, for whatever reason, not a set of four-part two-CD releases, but instead a set of two-part single CD releases, but there's nevertheless an adamant adherence to the traditional structure of Doctor Who. And as ever, this is not entirely sane. A perusal of essays I've written about two-parters will note one of the basic flaws they tend to have, which is that their pacing gets determined by the necessity of a cliffhanger at the halfway mark. So, to use *The Auntie Matter* as an example, the entire story is structured so that the inevitable moment when Romana is about to have her body taken over happens at the halfway point, which in turn regulates when Romana and the Doctor can learn about the plot, which means that the first episode has to mark time trying to get to that moment, while the second one only has half an hour to wrap everything up. It is a decision that seems as though it could only satisfy people who find sexual release in hearing the Doctor Who theme roughly every half hour.

But equally, there's a real and deep pleasure that Big Finish can provide. *The Auntie Matter* kicks off the second set of Tom Baker audios from Big Finish, a set featuring stories about the Doctor and the Mary Tamm version of Romana. These started coming out at the beginning of 2013, six months after Mary Tamm passed away. They thus served as the last work of hers to be released.

And there's really no way not to love them a bit for that. Tamm and Baker had a fractious relationship on set in the 1970s, so the fact of them working together and enjoying it before she passed away is genuinely, properly something to savor. And, if a moment of grimness may be permitted, it's also worth noting that Tom Baker, at the age of 80, is now older than Hartnell, Troughton, and Pertwee were when they passed away, and is creeping up on Nicholas Courtney.

There simply aren't a lot of years left in which creating new Doctor Who with Tom Baker is going to be an option. And given that, there's a sense in which quality is almost beside the point. The real reason for *The Auntie Matter* to exist is a sort of artistic equivalent of visiting two aging friends.

There are, of course, ways in which the story pushes against this unsatisfyingly. Being a Jonathan Morris story (and we'll see a bigger example of this in a few essays), it inevitably hinges on a somewhat elaborate structural conceit, although in this case one that's not too elaborate. Early on in the story, the Doctor and Romana split up and separately engage with the adventure, only to learn that the other was also involved after everything has wrapped up. It's one of several sources of quality comedy in the story (as is a gratuitous recitation of one of the most infamously awful lines in all of Doctor Who), but equally, the fact that Baker and Tamm get exactly two scenes together feels like a bit of a waste. Admittedly, Big Finish can hardly be faulted for the way in which Tamm's death makes this more frustrating, but there's something weird and ever so slightly ill-advised about the decision to kick off a run of Doctor/Romana stories with one in which they barely interact. This isn't out of keeping with Big Finish, who did after all massively troll their entire audience with a 40th anniversary story that served as a reunion of four of the five living actors to play the Doctor, only with three of them cast in different roles. But in many ways that just adds to the sense that there's something strange and slightly pathological about how Big Finish relates to the rest of Doctor Who.

But even if *The Auntie Matter* is an odd and awkward sort of story that's difficult to draw much of a critical bead on, this seems, as is the case for a lot of Big Finish's output, like a silly objection. It's an opportunity to have fun revisiting an era of Doctor Who one last time before the possibility of doing so slips away forever. It's a joyful homage to the humor that characterized its era. The world is a better place for it, in spite of some of the stranger aspects of it. Perhaps even because of them.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea: The Winter of Discontent

> *Jack always said it was difficult for us Americans to understand what it was really like here in the darkest parts of the eighties. We had a doddery old President who talked about the end of the world a little too often and was being run by the wrong people. But they had a Prime Minister who was genuinely mad. You know there were even feminists and women's studies theorists who denied she was even really a woman anymore, she was so far out of her tree? She wanted concentration camps for AIDS victims, wanted to eradicate homosexuality even as an abstract concept, made poor people choose between eating and keeping their vote, ran the most shameless vote-grabbing artificial war scam in fifty years... England was a scary place. No wonder it produced a scary culture.* - Warren Ellis, *Planetary* #7

There is another angle to take here, of course. One can look at the Williams era in terms of the flawed genius that pops up intermittently. One can also look at it as an era in which the routine genius that characterized much of the preceding fourteen years of Doctor Who starts to come apart at the seams. This latter perspective, ironically, does a better job of making Doctor Who look like it was in step with the times than the more charitable reading. The truth is, Britain was an absolute mess in the late 1970s.

In general I attempt to maintain some vague illusion of critical balance at *TARDIS Eruditorum*. Even in political matters, where my overt progressivism is unmistakably a thing, I try very hard to acknowledge the points where leftist politics have failed and to find concrete lessons, both rhetorical and substantive, for their failures. But here we reach a new sort of problem of balance, one we've been circling about since the late Pertwee era and the Three Day Week. And that problem is, in a nutshell, Margaret Thatcher.

But in many ways, the material horrors of Thatcher's Britain, though considerable, aren't even quite the point when looking at Doctor Who's engagement with her. I mean, yes, of course I think Thatcher was horrible. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody who's been reading the whole of these books – I'm a commie pinko leftist of the first order. But there is something about Thatcher that goes beyond mere political reason. I joked back in Volume Three that Thatcher was "basically the raw embodiment of all evil." This is, of course, in part a moment of deadpan exaggeration. And yet as comments about Thatcher go, it's not even particularly harsh.

The truth is, there's almost no such thing as overstatement on the subject of Margaret Thatcher, as the Ellis quote I started us off with demonstrates. None

of it is strictly speaking untrue (although technically the concentration camps for AIDS victims were Lord Christopher Monckton, one of the UK's few genuine attempts at an American-style political nutjob), and it doesn't even scratch the surface of the horrors of Thatcherism. But more than a sober analysis of her policies, what seems relevant is the fact that Margaret Thatcher achieved the impressive feat of having more songs written during her lifetime that celebrated the fact that someday she'd die than any other major political figure in an English-speaking country. So deep-seated and passionate are Thatcher's detractors that upon the occasion of her death in 2013 the song "Ding Dong the Witch is Dead" managed to make it to number two in the charts as part of an organized protest.

There is, in other words, a loathing of Thatcher that exists in excess to any remotely plausible requirements. People without successful genocides to their names don't generally require this sort of hatred. The sheer vitriol directed at Thatcher, particularly when it turned to the active celebration of her death that followed inevitably from the number of pop songs already written to celebrate that fact, is, in some ways, genuinely uncomfortable. To some extent these understandable feelings can be effectively mitigated by watching video of some miners being beaten or by contemplating the loss of life on the *General Belgrano*, but there's still a troubling kernel here – a moment where one stops short, momentarily thrown by the savagery of it all.

Part of this, and this is the other thing that the Ellis quote gets at, is that Margaret Thatcher exists in two spheres. Politically she is loathsome, but loathsome in what is at least a relatively constrained sense. She is at or near the limit point of how bad liberal democracy can get, a worst case scenario for 20th century electoral politics. And if we are to be honest, this must be contextualized in a larger sense. She is not Pol Pot or Pinochet. She may have aided and supported both, but she never actually used death squads herself, and I suppose that counts for something.

But there is also the cultural Thatcher. If we're being perfectly honest about why I despise Margaret Thatcher, given that I wasn't born when she came into power and was only eight and hadn't even heard of her when she fell from power, the reasons are far more prosaic. Most of the music I love is either '80s British new wave bands, bands that were heavily influenced by it, or bands that were heavy influences on it. My favorite era of the classic series of Doctor Who is the Cartmel era. A large swath of my favorite writers come out of the British Invasion of comics writers in the late '80s, with Alan Moore, my avowed favorite, being at the front. And all of these creative sources were fiercely anti-Thatcher.

But more than that, they were defined by how anti-Thatcher they were. I was talking to a good friend, S. Alexander Reed, who wrote a major book on the history of industrial music. In the course of writing the book, he interviewed Nigel Ayers of the band Nocturnal Emissions. "What were the politics of the early-80s UK underground? Socialist? Anarchist?" he asked. Ayers's reply was

simple and revealing: "Anti-Thatcher." Just Thatcher. Period. She was a teleology unto herself.

This dimension of Thatcher is somewhat harder to grasp. There are, I think, two major reasons for it. The first is simple historical fact. Thatcher was the most prominent figure in what was the most thorough and complete restructuring of British society since the immediate aftermath of World War II. Simply put, what one would consider the default values and principles of British politics in 1990 when she left power were radically different from those when she was elected in 1979, to the point that when Labour finally wrested Downing Street back in 1997, after nearly two decades of Conservative rule, they did so largely by conceding almost every philosophical point they'd once differed on to Thatcher.

The second reason, though, is that for all of the ways that Thatcher represented a brutal return to Enlightenment values and the idea of a master narrative, she and her handlers were also breathtakingly savvy at media manipulation. Thatcher was the first Prime Minister for whom it could be said that the modern media environment was her native tongue. Others used the media, yes, but Thatcher as a politician did not exist separate from it. Her media image was a fundamental part of her entire politics. There was, in a very real sense, no difference between her leadership and the press coverage of her leadership. She may not have thought that society existed, but she certainly believed in the existence of the mass media like no Prime Minister before her.

We'll return to the broader consequences of this, but for now let's leave it at this. The fact that Thatcher was so media savvy caused her to be a more diffuse phenomenon rather than a personal one. In a very real sense Thatcher was an always-present force – a mental phenomenon rather than a purely material one. Of course people reacted against her in a way that did not quite make sense for reacting against a person. She wasn't just a person. She was a brand. An ideology. A sigil, if you like.

That, then, is the "what" of May of 1979 – or, at least, as much of it as can be understood without turning to the "how." First we have the "consensus" explanation, by which I mean the default. Of course, given the magnitude of Thatcher's social and cultural victory, we should be suspicious off the bat. History is written by the victors, and while Thatcher herself may be gone it's considerably less clear that the historical moment that she represents has given way to a new one. The 1980s, even in their longest sense, have ended, sure. But if a coherent "next step" from Thatcherism exists, we remain, at the time of writing, too much in the middle of it to define its edges.

Regardless, if one is vaguely sympathetic to Thatcher then the story goes something like this: Broadly speaking, there is an economic model called Keynesianism, named, unsurprisingly, after a guy named Keynes. To collapse scads of complex economic theories into a single sentence, Keynesianism says that if the government spends money it will create more money. Keynesian thought formed the basis of most economic policy in the US and UK for several

decades. Then in the 1970s it abruptly stopped working and the world blew up.

Well, it didn't quite blow up. But a big problem called "stagflation" happened whereby the economy of a whole bunch of countries stopped growing, except that inflation kept growing. This was a big problem because, most of the time, fixing slow economic growth causes inflation and fixing inflation slows growth. The UK was hit hard by this, first in the energy crisis that led to the Three Day Week, and then again in 1976 when the government had to seek a massive loan from the IMF, which, in traditional IMF style, demanded massive austerity measures. It was, in other words, an extremely rotten economy.

In an attempt to control inflation the Labour government adopted a policy of wage control on government employees with the support of the Trades Union Congress. This lasted for several years until Ford of Britain, despite being a massive government contractor, decided to defy the 5% maximum on wage increases by offering its striking employees a 17% raise in November of 1978. Coupled with some stinging political defeats for Labour when the TUC and its supporters rejected its latest round of wage controls, the government was essentially left with no support for actually enforcing its wage controls on the private sector.

Seizing on the weakness, various unions began pushing hard for considerable price increases, and they went on strike to get them. The result was that in the coldest winter since 1963 industry after industry was disrupted by major strike actions, generally with considerable theatricality on both sides. For instance, when striking Lorry drivers failed to let through the correct set of emergency supplies for farmers in Hull, farmers deposited bodies of pigs and chickens outside the union headquarters. Other infamous events included a two-week gravediggers' strike that led to speculation that people would simply be buried at sea, and a garbage strike that led to Leicester Square in the middle of London becoming a makeshift landfill. Finally, in late March, the Scottish National Party, frustrated at the government's lack of support for further devolution of power to Scotland, withdrew from the coalition, causing Callaghan, the prime minister, to lose a no-confidence vote, forcing a general election which Thatcher won.

At the heart of this narrative is, of course, an idea of inevitability. The system that Callaghan was following was shown to be a failure, the people voted him out and Thatcher in, and she inaugurated a new age of supply-side economics. A similar story can just as easily be told about the US in 1980 to explain Reagan's election. The benefit of this narrative, of course, is that it neatly sidesteps the question of whether Thatcher was right. Whatever the horrors of Thatcherism – and as we'll get to see over the next eleven years of history, there are oh so many of them – she was necessary because the alternative was shown to be fatally flawed.

The first problem with this narrative is that it involves overlooking a fundamental imbalance within the British political system. Simply put, the right-wing vote has, for the entire post-War era, been taken by one political party,

whereas the left-wing vote is typically split between the Labour party and the Liberal party. Thatcher's decisive rise to power in 1979 came with an impressive 43.9% of the vote, but the combined total of Labour and the Liberal party was 50.7%. In other words, Thatcher came to power in an election where an outright majority of the voting public voted for a left-wing party. There was never a consensus around Thatcherism – just an electoral reality that meant that the right could win a majority in the House of Commons with a minority of votes.

The second problem is that any argument that Thatcher's policies were necessary is tricky. The truth is that economics isn't really a falsifiable discipline. I mean, it sort of is – it's just that running the experiments necessary to falsify claims usefully and thoroughly isn't feasible. As a result, with any sort of story like this, one runs the risk of confusing what happened with what was inevitable. In truth, of course, it is impossible to say with any real knowledge or confidence what would have happened in any number of alternative circumstances. It is, for instance, wholly possible – even probable – that Callaghan would have won re-election had he called the election in the fall of 1978 instead of engaging in another round of wage controls. Or if he hadn't made a crushing gaffe in which he denied that the industrial actions constituted a crisis as he returned home from a summit in Guadeloupe in early January. Callaghan was politically incompetent as much as anything, a fact that, in politics, is more than sufficient to cause electoral defeat.

But there's a broader issue in treating Thatcher's rise as an inevitable transition, which is that it's not particularly clear that Thatcher was actually the turning point in the ascension of the ideology she represents. It is perilous, or at the very least a cheap argumentative move, to attempt to summarize any ideology in a single sentence. But having oversimplified Keynes let's attempt to collapse the whole of Thatcherism into one belief: the belief that monetary profitability is the only meaningful measurement of worth, and thus that more profit is always better.

But in this regard virtually all sides of the debate had given the game away long before the 1979 election. Callaghan was barely different from Thatcher in this regard. They both took it as essentially axiomatic that economic growth was a necessary priority and that an essentially capitalist system had to remain in place. The IMF loan itself was fundamentally a triumph of neoliberalism (a term that encompasses Thatcherism, Reaganism, and the other right-wing governments of the 1980s, and that causes no end of confusion for Americans who take "liberal" and "left-wing" to be synonymous). Even the unions essentially conceded the core of the debate to neoliberalism, treating their job as extracting the maximum possible amount of money for their members, specifically – becoming, in essence, profit-seeking entities in their own right.

Once all sides have fully and thoroughly embraced the capitalist drive towards maximizing individual profit and endless expansion, the reversion to Thatcherism is inevitable. Not, however, because Thatcher marked some sort of historical transition; rather, because she marked an acknowledgment of a

transition that had already happened. In this regard, even though a decade has passed, we're really only finishing the job that started in 1968 when the left-wing radicalism that characterized 1960s counterculture went into terminal decline. Once you've rejected the radical possibilities of the Situationists in favor of capitalism, Thatcherism isn't a transition so much as a logical endpoint.

The philosopher Slavoj Žižek has a memorable (at least to me) moment in one of his books in which he imagines a yuppie reading a book by French philosopher Giles Deleuze and, contrary to what one might expect of a yuppie reading a book by someone who (much as I imagine Deleuze would object to the characterization – though given that he is dead and wouldn't be likely to read my book anyway, his objections count for very little) may as well be called a Situationist, loving every moment of it, exclaiming things like, "Yes, this is how I design my publicities!" and, "This reminds me of my son's favorite toy!"

Reading Guy Debord, one is seized continually with a similar feeling. Every snarling epithet in which he denounces the mechanisms of capitalism reads equally well as a design manual for the very system he decries – a list of tactics to convince people that your profit and their freedom are somehow equivalent. I am not the first to joke that were one to design a bourgeois reverse engineering of Marxism to act as a collective class in pursuit of their common interests it would be difficult if not impossible to come up with a better approach to the problem than the neoliberalism of the 1980s.

Here, then, we can see the true revolution of Thatcherism. It is not the turn towards profit as the sole and absolute value of the world. Rather, it is the devastating practical refutation of what had previously been axiomatic: the idea that postmodernism was inherently leftist. This is at the heart of Thatcher's peculiar notion of conservatism. It is visible in her hilarious claim that William Gladstone would be a Tory if he were alive in the 1980s, as though the statement that her party was very progressive by the standards of a century ago was in some way meaningful. Thatcher's conservatism hinged on the willful confusion of what was with what is nostalgically remembered, seeking endlessly to mask further acceleration towards the culture of naked and unabashed greed she championed as a "return" to a past that, in truth, never was. Even her famed declaration that she was a politician of "conviction," when scrutinized, collapses to little more than a moment of arch-relativism. Her worldview was valid not because it was based on the product of consensus or even evidence, but because it was based on fundamental and unshakable personal belief. Thatcherism, in this view, is little more than heavily armed relativism.

In this regard the position that really drops out of the mix is conservatism, at least in its classical sense of trying to maintain the current state of affairs or return to the past. Malcolm Hulke, of course, saw this as far back as 1974 in his rejection of the very idea of a "golden age." But the point remains. This is in many ways a triumph of postmodernism. The past is a foreign country, accessible only through memory and reconstruction. So why not construct the future you want and pretend that it was the past? Throw in a patois of genuine

social conservatism and you can hijack the rhetorical appeal of conservatism to serve a progress narrative towards whatever future you desire. Thus you have the gaudy and contradictory spectacle of the contemporary right's belief that government shouldn't interfere with business, only with how people have sex.

The real problem is that this tactic has proven appallingly difficult to counter. Once the right realized that postmodernist tactics could serve their purposes just as well as they could anyone else's it became very, very difficult to outflank them. This sort of trick still describes the right-wing playbook in 2014. Language is just a social construct, so why not improperly use the word "socialism" to describe Barack Obama's basically neoliberal economic policies? It'll become what socialism means soon enough anyway.

For our purposes, then, Thatcher provides a moment of genuine horror. We've nodded at this in part already with the Mary Whitehouse essay at the end of the previous book, but here it becomes a very fundamental challenge to the entire philosophical edifice we've been building. We've been holding that the solution to the problem of alchemy is material social progress. But Thatcher provides an even simpler solution. After all, what better philosopher's stone is there than money, a substance that truly can transmute any object into any other object? What is more mercurial than currency? What better represents the abstract and floating nature of the signifier than the coin, which truly can mean absolutely anything in the world?

There are, of course, a wealth of answers to that question, and Doctor Who has been formulating them with varying degrees of confidence for sixteen seasons now. Thatcher, at a Conservative policy meeting, once famously threw down a copy of Friedrich von Hayek's The Constitution of Liberty and proclaimed, "This is what we believe." She may as well have thrown down the script for *The Evil of the Daleks*, *The Ribos Operation*, or even, for all its ostensibly anti-tax leanings, *The Sun Makers* and said, "and this is what we don't." And now she runs the country.

Under the circumstances, a Doctor Who that's coming apart at the seams really might capture the national mood better than a quality product ever could.

The Thing It Does Most Efficiently (*Destiny of the Daleks*)

It's September 1, 1979. Cliff Richard is at the top of the charts with "We Don't Talk Anymore," a title that seems almost tautological as song titles go. After three weeks it's unseated by Gary Numan's "Cars," a song that poses something of a fundamental philosophical problem. I mean, it was one thing to try to pretend that we were facing down business as usual when we were airing the Williams era while "Wuthering Heights" was at number one or when Siouxsie and the Banshees were charting. But now we're basically just kicking down the door for New Wave. Lower in the charts are the Boomtown Rats with "I Don't Like Mondays," and The Police with "Message in a Bottle," as well as ELO, Roxy Music, and Earth, Wind, and Fire, the first two of which at least heighten the sense that there's something off here – that the 80s have well and truly started without remembering to invite Doctor Who along for the ride.

Since *The Armageddon Factor* wrapped, most obviously, we've had Margaret Thatcher's election, but we've talked about that already. The compact disc got its first public demo, two workers died in the collapse of the Penmanshiel Tunnel in Scotland, and then ten more in a methane explosion in a coal mine near Wigan. The Three Mile Island disaster happened, killing/injuring exactly nobody, and yet being altogether more famous than either of those accidents. Gay men rioted in San Francisco after Harvey Milk's killer managed a light sentence on the back of the infamous Twinkie Defense. John Paul II visited Poland in what ended up being a tremendously influential and important trip. Skylab crashed into Australia, the famed Disco Demolition Night took place in Chicago, Saddam Hussein took power, and Lord Mountbatten of Burma was assassinated by the IRA. Oh, and Jimmy Carter was attacked by a non-IRA-affiliated rabbit.

While during this story ESPN and *For Better or For Worse* debut. Emperor Bokassa (of the Central African Empire, formerly and shortly thereafter the Central African Republic), due to being, to borrow a phrase from Eddie Izzard, a mass-murdering fuckhead, is forcibly deposed by the French after he approves of and possibly participates in a massacre of students protesting against wearing a uniform with his face on it (after previously blowing 20% of the country's GDP on his coronation). And the day that the final episode of this story airs the Vela Incident, a possible nuclear test by an unknown party (the smart money is generally on Israel, South Africa, or a joint test between the two nations) takes place.

While on television... OK, look, *Destiny of the Daleks* is a disaster. But it's important to recognize why it's a disaster, or, perhaps more importantly, the many things that aren't disasters about it. Indeed, there are a lot of things that one could reasonably say are very good about it.

The first and most obvious of these is the presence of Douglas Adams. Miles, in one of his least defensible critical moments, suggests that Adams is actually the biggest problem here, focusing particularly on Romana's regeneration scene. There, of course, he offers the standard complaints – that it's an utter violation of everything we know about regeneration – along with the more esoteric, "If one of the central characters can change her appearance and personality just for a laugh, then all logic breaks down and no story can function." This is a problematic statement, due to it being mind-wrenchingly stupid. I mean, the deconstructionist in me already wants to just go off on the phrases "all logic" and "no story" for their absolutism and the way in which they're carefully crafted to foreclose possibilities without having to consider them. All logic breaks down? Really? There's no logic whatsoever that applies? Come now.

To anyone with an even vague awareness of the circumstances that happened here, the logic is obvious. Mary Tamm quit, Graham Williams didn't get a replacement scene in at the end of *The Armageddon Factor*, and he was left with the choice of just dropping her without explanation a la Liz Shaw or, well, using the fact that she's a Time Lord and regenerating her. And without Mary Tamm... I mean, what, does Miles just want Lalla Ward to put on a Mary Tamm wig and roll over before Davros enters and shouts, "Leave the man, it's the girl I want?" Say what you want about the opening scene, and I'm certainly not going to proclaim that it's the program's finest hour, but there's a job to be done and it gets it done with a minimum of fuss. The companion change needs to be addressed, and Adams at least sees to it that it's addressed humorously and that the story then moves on. Anyone with existent visual literacy will recognize the first scene as a lark that is separate from the rest of the story – a momentary pastiche to paper over a necessary plot hole before we get on to business. Clearly there is some kind of logic here, and it's not even meaningfully different from the logic applied when you can see the zipper on the back of a monster costume. One might as well say, "If the villain is obviously a man in a rubber suit and not a real monster then all logic breaks down and no story can function." I mean, really.

No, in fact the regeneration scene marks one of the things that visibly improves with Adams's taking over, which is that the way in which the show handles its deficiencies becomes more efficient and effective. Since *The Sun Makers* we've been working with a kind of big problem whereby Doctor Who's reach rather dramatically exceeds its grasp. There we formulated the idea that there was something of a punk sensibility to this inadequacy, but by this point the series has started to figure out how to respond to its gaps in a programmatic way. Routinely through this story, moments that could be embarrassing – even old standards like a planet-in-a-quarry or the mobility difficulties of Daleks – get turned swiftly into occasions for a laugh. And unlike much of the humor over the last two seasons, it generally avoids gaudy showboating, preferring a quick single beat like the Doctor excitedly saying, "Oh, look! Rocks!" before the scene

moves on. The only such moment that showboats at all is when he taunts the Dalek about following him up the shaft, but since that moment is sixteen seasons of audience expectations being fulfilled it's tough to begrudge the show for slowing down and enjoying the comedy beat.

Helping this, of course, is Lalla Ward, who is phenomenally good. Mary Tamm's Romana was a solid character who was artful at providing an ironic distance from events. But this led equally to one of the sounder complaints that Miles levels against the Williams era, which is that she doesn't look like she believes a word of what she's saying. This didn't invalidate the character – if anything, giving the show a mouthpiece for the audience's occasional eyerolls was a solid move that gave a skeptical audience aware that the show looked a bit dodgy a way to engage with it. But it did mean that every character in the show was being played with a dose of self-aware irony. I'm not a huge fan of the idea of "audience identification" characters, but between the general style of Baker's Doctor, Tamm's detachment, and K-9 being a computer there was often not actually any emotion being generated by any of the lead characters, and that could be a problem.

But Ward introduces something that has been missing from the program since Sarah Jane departed: a sense of warmth and joy in the adventures. She still has Tamm's ability to wryly comment on the absurdity of the plot, but Ward is able to suffuse that with sheer glee. One gets the sense that Ward's Romana is not only at home in the silliness of the universe, but that she absolutely adores it. Even her witticisms are given a sense of earnestness. Take, for instance, the scene in which she comments upon having two hearts, saying, "One for casual and one for best." It's a joke, of course, but Ward delivers the joke with conviction. It's a gorgeous delivery – one that doesn't make it look like she (or her character) is unaware of the joke, but one that still seems real enough that the line can reveal something of her character beyond the fact that she's funny. That the underlying idea – that one has a different heart for different levels of formality – is completely gonzo gets glossed over. Before the audience gets to adequately contemplate the multiple and contradictory levels at which the line communicates, the scene has moved on. It's a charm offensive that puts Baker to shame. (And notably, the moment she walks on screen he seems to up his game, as though aware that he actually has to fight for the audience's affections again.)

Beyond that, there are some important technical advances with this story, most notably the introduction of Steadicam to the show's visual repertoire. Steadicam is a technical advance that's easy to take for granted in hindsight, but it has enormous implications: it allows for much more complex camera movement without the shakiness of hand-held footage. Doctor Who ended up testing a unit for the BBC in this story.

What's significant about Steadicam is that it marks a major step in a transition away from the older and more theatrical model of storytelling and towards something more dynamic and cinematic. With Steadicam it becomes much more possible to move the camera around in space so that the sets can be

rooms as opposed to models of rooms. On a superficial level this increases that "realism" thing I'm usually so skeptical of, but the real appeal is subtler. By increasing the complexity of televisual space you get more ways of telling the story and more ways of conveying information.

Which means, for all its obvious flaws, *Destiny of the Daleks* is surprisingly well shot. The camera does things we haven't seen before, seeming to creep around the rubble and twisty passages of the ruined Dalek city. The result is that, even more so than *Genesis of the Daleks,* the Dalek city feels like a coherent space. This is impressive, as for while *Genesis of the Daleks* lacked the Steadicam, it had one of the show's best directors in David Maloney. Here we have Ken Grieves, who is clearly competent, but who only ever directed this one story and who does not have a particularly notable larger career. And yet the technology puts him on par with what the series used to only be able to do when it had the best of the best.

So we've got Douglas Adams learning to work around the problems that have plagued the series so far, directing that's got a better baseline, and the entrance of one of the best actresses to play a companion in the classic series. What goes wrong? The answer is simple: at the end of the day, this is still a Terry Nation script.

One of the most interesting ways to look at the classic series is in terms of when longstanding elements make their final appearances. And Season Seventeen is interesting because it's the last season to feature stories written or directed by people who wrote or directed for the first season of Doctor Who back in 1963-64. We'll deal with the directing in two essays' time, but in terms of writing, this is the last hurrah of Terry Nation, and the sad truth is that it's long overdue.

The litany of faults that can be laid at Nation's feet is easy to list and can be found in most reviews. For the sake of critical completism, however, I'll go over them at high speed. The story genuinely believes that the mere existence of the Daleks and Davros is a plot hook. It maintains the first episode cliffhanger reveal of the Daleks tradition that Nation has always used even in stories in which "the Daleks" are in the title. It shows utter disregard for the actual idea of the Daleks, turning them into robots when the fact that they weren't robots was always one of the more interesting things about them. Its conception of logic is stupid. And it not only is a tedious series of captures and escapes but one done with the apparent belief that captures and escapes are in and of themselves inherently interesting.

But all of this amounts to a special case of the real observation, which is that it's not 1963 anymore. Even in 1963, Nation's Dan Dare stylings and penchant for uncomplicated action adventure were retro. Now they look painfully antiquated. Whatever the faults of the larger era here, the series has long since moved on from when things like this worked. It's bigger and more interesting than this, and all the small technical refinements in the world can't hide that fact.

Brimming With Vast Intelligence
(*City of Death*)

It's September 29th, 1979. The Police are sending out an SOS to the world, and they send it out for three weeks before The Buggles notice that The Police are radio stars and kill them. Blondie, The Commodores, Michael Jackson, and Kate Bush also make the top ten, while XTC and The Damned sit lower in the charts.

In real news, the Hong Kong MTR opens, Nigeria brings an end to military rule, and Pope John Paul II, fresh from getting the ball rolling on the eventual collapse of the autocratic government of his native Poland, goes to the United States. Tragically, he's less successful there, though barely a week after his departure a massive gay rights march takes place in Washington DC, which is almost but not quite as good as the collapse of the government. A tsunami hits in Nice, a tornado in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, and a mob of pro-government thugs hits a newspaper and the home of the opposition leader in Malta.

While on television, we have a terribly unpopular story that no reputable fan enjoyed. No less an authority than John Peel, who later went on to helpfully fix the continuity errors introduced by *Destiny of the Daleks*, explains that the story is "pure farce," that "the acting was once more appalling," that characters were "so stupid as to be unbelievable," that he "couldn't believe that this was Doctor Who," and that it was "getting completely on [his] nerves." So there you go. And to think, Miles and Wood spend two pages asking whether we should take one of his books seriously.

Speaking of Miles and Wood, this is the story in which their dueling style of review finally leaps into hilarious self-parody. Miles (quite correctly) proclaims that "it is, of course, one of the best things ever" before engaging in a review that consists almost entirely of explanations of why nothing else in the Williams era works as well as this. Wood, on the other hand, spends most of his critique explaining why Miles is wrong and why the rest of the Williams era really is as good as this. All well and good, except for the rather massive failure to actually talk about this story. (On the other hand, Miles, in the course of a digression about how sitcoms work, does inadvertently pin down the central appeal of this era of *About Time*: "Two people who don't like each other, trapped in a room.")

What's actually going on here? First of all, let's concede a core point to Lawrence Miles. Regardless of what one thinks of the rest of the Williams era, this is head and shoulders above not only the remainder of the era but frankly above virtually everything to have aired in the series previously. It is searingly, jaw-droppingly good, and this does require setting it apart from the rest of the era somewhat. To say, as Tat Wood does, that this works because the whole era

works is to willfully miss the point – there really is something special here.

In that regard, at least, Miles is basically correct, and this gets at the central problem with the previous story, which Miles saw as a program at war with itself. Miles suggests that the problem is that the tension between the program's "tradition of fantasy adventure" and its current attempts at comedy are irreconcilable, which is at least a usable working hypothesis. The problem is that he clearly blames the increasing comedy for screwing up a good thing, which, as we saw in *Destiny of the Daleks*, is not really the case. The problem with *Destiny of the Daleks* is all the bits that aren't trying to be funny but rather a Dan Dare-style space adventure. Its flaws, in other words, were rooted in trying to appeal to sci-fi fans.

This, more than anything, is the central premise that needs to be refuted. For one thing, it's a premise that is behind almost everything that's going to go wrong for Doctor Who in the 1980s. Doctor Who has never been for sci-fi fans. Sure, it was sci-fi for a while – most obviously in the 1960s. But just because something is science fiction doesn't mean that it's made for people who identify as *fans* of science fiction. The 1960s were an era where science fiction was popular in general. All sorts of stuff were popular then, and ordinary people liked science fiction. It wasn't until the falling off of popularity after the moon landing that science fiction entered a period of being marginal and for a particular subset of self-identified fans. This, ironically, is the real legacy of *Star Trek*. It's not a notable program for its popularity, it's a notable program for its failure – for the fact that only a small core of hard-core devotees liked it, as opposed to the larger, broader audiences who had been enjoying science fiction only a few years earlier.

It's only after about 1970 that doing science fiction meant doing it "for fans," and it's notable that for the bulk of the 1970s Doctor Who spends almost all of its time trying to be anything but science fiction. It spends five years moonlighting as a military thriller before going off and becoming a horror series for three years. Even in the Williams era you see it trying desperately to avoid being sci-fi in the conventional sense – case in point, the Key to Time arc. It's only the popularity of *Star Wars* that creates the horrible gravity of sci-fi for the series. One of the most remarkable things about the period from 1975-1984 in the series is that it's a nine-year stretch in which there are only three Dalek stories despite the fact that the series had the rights to them. It was one thing for the Daleks to vanish from seasons five through eight while Terry Nation took his ball and went to America. It's quite another for them to vanish from seasons thirteen through sixteen when he didn't.

But this was what the 1970s producers of Doctor Who realized: sci-fi in its conventional sense was a marginalized ghetto of a genre that only a few die-hard adherents liked. The fact that those adherents glommed onto Doctor Who from the era where it was most sci-fi (namely seasons three through six) wasn't just irrelevant, it was an annoyance. You can still see vestiges of this problem if you're foolish enough to visit any number of Doctor Who forums, where you

can find all manner of people who complain that the problem with Doctor Who is that it's "too Harry Potter" and that various ideas aren't sci-fi enough. The problem with this perspective, and it's a truly bizarre one, is that many of these people appear to genuinely believe that an explanation about "biopsionic luminescence" or some similar piece of made-up technobabble would have made the series more entertaining, as if hearing random science prefixes smashed together is actually pleasurable unto itself. Which, I mean, clearly for some people it is, but let's be honest, that's a paraphilia, not an aesthetic.

So the first and foremost thing to realize about *City of Death* is that, like *The Ribos Operation* before it, it's one of the first Doctor Who stories to learn the correct lesson from *Star Wars*, which was that after twenty years of science fiction being popular and another ten of it being irritatingly present due to its fetishists, science fiction was so well-understood that you could just use its trappings for whatever you wanted. (This is why the moment in *The Phantom Menace* where the entire audience realized that the prequel trilogy was going to suck was not, as many claim, Jar Jar Binks or the poor portrayal of young Anakin, but rather the line about midichlorians, which suddenly and painfully revealed that George Lucas actually thought anyone was confused by or even cared about why a Muppet in a swamp had psychic powers.)

In a past entry I noted that the central brilliance of Doctor Who is that it realizes that once you have a big establishing shot of a Dalek fleet you can have the remainder of the story be the Doctor and Davros sitting in a basement chinwagging. And that's what's so thoroughly brilliant about *City of Death*. It spends all its sci-fi time on one model shot and a creepy alien mask and then uses that as a frame for a story that's really about Tom Baker and Julian Glover insulting each other for ninety minutes with Douglas Adams dialogue. Which is fantastic, because the BBC is fairly lousy at sci-fi action sequences, but it remains as good as anyone in the world at pointing a camera at Tom Baker and Julian Glover while they insult each other for ninety minutes with Douglas Adams dialogue.

What doing it as science fiction lets Adams do, however, is to use the basic fun of having Baker and Glover going at it to tell a much bigger and more interesting story than could be told in a more ostensibly "realist" genre. The real heart of this story is based on the idea of authenticity and fakery. Miles and Wood cite a bunch of quite good stuff on the difference between "worth" and "value," but if you really want to get at the heart of what's going on here you need to go for Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

For the most part when I opt to natter on about Marxism I have favored the French Situationists. Those for whom *TARDIS Eruditorum* is their primary window into the world of critical theory might therefore assume that the Situationists are the leading philosophical lights of Marxism. By and large I believe this to be true, but that position actually puts me outside the mainstream of humanities academia, which much more favors the so-called Frankfurt School

of Marxists. (I think they backed the wrong horse appallingly here, and that Frankfurt School Marxism is mostly good for feeling smugly superior while smoking a lot of weed, which, to be fair, is actually what most Marxists seem to be going for.) Walter Benjamin is not actually of the Frankfurt school, having died before their foundation, but he was a major influence on them and tends to be lumped in with them. More to the point for our purposes, however, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," his best known piece, formed the basis of John Berger's 1972 television series *Ways of Seeing*, which means that the ideas were thoroughly "in the air" in British culture.

The basic idea of Benjamin's essay is that modern media have created a fundamental shift in art, namely in the particular aspect of art which gives it its power, which Benjamin calls the "aura" of an artwork. Aura describes those aspects of art that are unique to the original: the fetishistic and almost mystical power of the real, authentic object. Benjamin suggests that mechanical reproduction has brought an end to aura, and that this means that art is "completely useless for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art."

It's the notion of aura that is most immediately relevant to this piece. In effect, what Scarlioni's scheme has allowed him to do is to create seven versions of the Mona Lisa, all of which are real – that is, all of which have aura. This (and not the spaceship stuff) is the real central sci-fi concept: the idea that it is possible to (quasi)mechanically reproduce aura itself.

The first and most obvious consequence of this is that the existing structures of art become transparently absurd. This manifests at various points of the story. In the way most relevant to the plot, of course, we have the basic absurdity of seven different collectors all of whom would be willing to buy the stolen Mona Lisa despite the fact that they could never show it to anyone, just for the sake of owning the painting. But the single most flagrant moment of mocking the absurdity of the art establishment is the cameo featuring John Cleese and Eleanor Bron, which jokes about the idea of imbuing a mundane object like a Police Box with aura simply by putting it into an art gallery and absent any actual artistry.

The real joke, of course, is that the TARDIS already possesses an aura of its own, one that Cleese and Bron's characters are wholly incapable of grasping even if they don't realize it. Having created a world in which even aura itself can be reproduced through Scarlioni's machinations, Adams introduces the Doctor in all his mercurial glory. Here Miles and Wood nail how the Doctor is cast perfectly. If Scarlioni is the one who can mechanize aura, the Doctor gets to play the role of Tom Keating.

Tom Keating is one of those people who properly understood that the only real way to become a folk hero is to become a master criminal first. Keating was an exceedingly talented art forger, which is not in and of itself a way to endear yourself to the public. But his real genius was not merely his ability to make stunningly good fakes but his ability to use them to unleash conceptual terrorism

on the art world. Essentially, pissed off at his own failure to break into the art world on the strength of his own paintings, he decided to take the entire art world down a host of pegs.

This meant that not only did he make convincing forgeries of all manner of art and sell them to private collectors, he was a magnificent dick about it. He refused to provide a list of his fakes even after he was caught, yet he'd deliberately use one or two anachronistic techniques or modern materials in making an otherwise wholly believable painting, paint a layer of glycerine under the paint so that when the painting was eventually cleaned it would self-destruct, or, and this is obviously the key one for our purposes, write messages under the paint that would be revealed if the painting were x-rayed.

Keating's paintings, befitting of his genius, now sell for thousands of pounds themselves, and, in one of the most glorious things ever to happen, there have even been forgeries of his forgeries. He is in this regard the postmodernist's dream, a producer of artifice that becomes real in and of itself. And, of course, in *City of Death* the Doctor manages the exact same thing, slipping a copy of the Mona Lisa with "THIS IS A FAKE" written on it into the Louvre itself.

In this regard Adams inverts Benjamin's rather dystopic view of the world, showing how even in an age of mechanical reproduction art is, in fact, completely useless for the purposes of fascism. The "moral" of the story as such is the point that the Mona Lisa is valuable not for its financial value but because of its beauty – because of the worth of looking at it. In this regard, of course, it situates itself in explicit opposition to the neoliberal ideal. Scarlioni serves as a high-culture version of the right-wing war on art subsidies and their insistence that art should be able to pay for itself. Having six extra Mona Lisas created is in this regard a move of considerable genius – the ultimate Thatcherite expression of how art should work. (And note how Scarlioni bends the entirety of human history to his purposes. Literally all of human history turns out to build up to a profit-making scheme. He really is an arch-Thatcherite.)

And the Doctor outdoes him not with some defense of art but with Tom Keating. Scarlioni figures out how to mechanically reproduce aura itself, so Baker one-ups him by just deflating aura and draining art of its ritual power. Crucially, however, the story's attack on art does not stop there. *City of Death* is itself packed to the brim with stray bits of fakery. Some of these are small scale, and even potentially accidents: a French cafe showing English language news, the fact that Scaroth's proper Jagaroth head could never fit inside Julian Glover's, or the utterly motiveless removal of Scaroth's human mask for the sake of a cliffhanger. Others are more clever, like the joke about whether the Doctor and Romana should "fly" down the Eiffel Tower that sets up an apparent moment in which they do so in episode four, or the insertion of a fake "skip" in the tape in episode one. And, of course, there's the big one: the fact that the plot resolves not because of the Doctor and his cleverness, but because the brute force detective slugs Scaroth. The story itself, in the end, turns out not to be a Doctor Who story.

But all of this dances around the real beauty and truth of it. The ultimate example of fakery in any given Doctor Who story is, of course, the Doctor himself. Whether it's his propensity for impersonation or simply bamboozling his way into the halls of power, the Doctor has always been the charismatic faker. His Doctorate is, by all Earth standards, non-existent. He makes almost certainly fabricated claims about having met historical figures. Even his very body turns out to be a forgery of the human form, and he continually reveals, through odd ticks or turns of phrase, his lack of authenticity. From day one, when he turned out to be a fake grandfather in a fake police box living in a junkyard and sending Susan to school under a fake identity, the Doctor has been a forgery.

All of this, of course, would be mere cleverness were it not built on the foundation of a fantastic piece of character-based comedy. The cleverness and trickery is there, yes, but that's not why the story was so popular. Nor, notably, was the ITV strike that left it as the only television in town. Sure, it helped and boosted the ratings, but notably the fourth part went out after the strike was over and ITV had resumed normal programming, and that was the episode that hit Doctor Who's all-time ratings high. No, the reason this was so watched and so beloved is simple: it's hilariously fun.

Because at the end of the day, that's the heart and soul of this story. All of the great little lines, from Scaroth, from the Countess, from Romana, and, of course, from the Doctor himself. It is raucously, brilliantly funny, and no surprise given that it's written by one of the best comic writers of the 20th century in any country.

And notably, this is also the real political content of the story. This is why it serves as a rejoinder to Benjamin's idea that art, once mechanical reproduction robs aura of its power, becomes a tool of fascism. Because in the face of a villain who has bent the entire teleology of human progress to capitalist production, the Doctor and the series itself – through glorious and unrepentant fakery – remind us of the single most crucial and effective refutation of Thatcher and the neoliberal program that there is. This story isn't just great, it's another one of the definitive shifts and developments in Doctor Who's basic philosophy.

And this is something that has shown itself more and more clearly as time has gone on. Watching it today, one of the most striking things is how much more like the new series *City of Death* is than anything else around it; indeed, one of the most straightforward paths to successful Doctor Who is to be like *City of Death*. On the level of basic formula, this is the first story in which nearly everything the Doctor says or does is a witticism. It's the first time a writer has really gotten the Doctor to work so that he can constantly and simultaneously clown about while seriously working on saving the world. The Doctor chalks his relaxed attitude up to being on holiday, but this is a fake as well. The Doctor's always on holiday. That's the point of him. He doesn't work or labor – he lives.

(Unsurprisingly, it's Gareth Roberts, whose admiration for this story and this era of Doctor Who outstrips almost anyone else's, who can nail this story's

style the best. *The Lodger* and *Closing Time* are almost effortless executions of the *City of Death* formula. How perfect it is that the villain of *The Lodger* turns out to be, indirectly, the Silence – another race who bent humanity to their own purposes. Even their line in *The Day of the Moon* about having been there for fire and the wheel echoes Scaroth's claiming of credit for those exact two inventions.)

It is not, I think, a coincidence that the Thatcher era coincided with such an explosion of art and culture that I adore – that so many great writers and musicians established themselves during it. The reason for this is simple: this countercultural artistic production is among the most fundamental weapons in existence against the right. We alluded to this back in the Mary Whitehouse essay, but here we can codify it fully.

Scarlioni can print money, wage war, and divert the entire course of history to his purposes. So let him. Let him have the institutions of power, the control over the artistic world, let him have everything. For all of that, the Doctor, in all his fake and mercurial glory, still wins for one simple reason. He's more fun. Thatcher's subsuming of postmodernism is, in this regard, ultimately and necessarily incomplete. She can take control of much of it, yes, allow the fluid nature of signifiers and the subjectivity of memory and history to serve her purposes. But there is one aspect of the postmodern that can never, ever be bent into the service of oppression. And over time, it is this aspect of it that will always win out. This is the true inevitable force of history, and the one the Doctor embraced when he rejected the Time Lords' hollow and vacant joke of historical inevitability to run off on perpetual holiday. It is the content of every one of his victories and the moral force behind every moment of rage he shows.

And it is the one thing that Thatcher, fatally, lacks. At the end of the day, she's just no fun.

They've Taken This Animal and Turned it Into a Joke (*The Creature from the Pit*)

It's October 27, 1979. Lena Martell is at number one with "One Day at a Time," which is described as gospel-tinged country music. So that's exactly the sort of thing that a Scottish singer is probably good at. After three weeks it's unseated by Dr. Hook's "When You're In Love With A Beautiful Woman." Fleetwood Mac, Sad Cafe, Queen, and The Jam also chart.

While in proper news, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines become independent from the UK. The Carl Bridgewater murder trial ends with all four of the accused being found guilty, though their convictions are overturned in 1997. NORAD computers in the US detect a massive Soviet nuclear strike, but it turns out to be a false alarm because someone put a training tape in the wrong slot and fooled the computer. Oops. Ted Kennedy declares that he'll offer a primary challenge to Jimmy Carter. Also, the Iran hostage crisis begins with a mob of 3,000 Iranians seizing the US embassy and holding 90 people, 53 of whom are American, hostage. Carter responds by freezing all Iranian assets in the US, and it all goes very well for him.

While on television we have *The Creature from the Pit*, one of the most tragically misunderstood stories in Doctor Who's history. Some people, it seems, just don't understand a proper anti-capitalist screed when they see one, including the director of this story, Christopher Barry. Or, at least, that's Tat Wood's assessment, and on this point at least I'm inclined to agree.

For all that he causes trouble here, it's worth summarizing Barry's career so that this late failure can be put in context. He directed the bulk of *The Daleks*, including the iconic first appearance of the Dalek itself. He directed classics like *Power of the Daleks*, and *The Brain of Morbius*. And he directed some lesser but still quite nice efforts like *The Rescue* and *The Daemons*. Taken as a whole, he's one of the best directors of the classic series.

His sole problem here is that time passes. In the normal course of things someone who was a solid television director in 1963 probably shouldn't still be one in 1979. Virtually the entire medium changed over those 16 years. One of the good things about John Nathan-Turner's increasingly imminent arrival is his decision to bring new blood into many aspects of the program. He overdoes it in some cases, but more often than not he correctly identifies things that are only being done the way they are because they've always been done that way, and he subsequently changes them. But equally, it's easy to see how those problems came up in the first place. This is the seventeenth season of Doctor Who. There wasn't a rulebook on how to handle a show that had evolved continually over

that kind of time span. Science fiction had never done something like "Season Seventeen" before. And so it's easy to see how "the way we've always done it" became "the only way to do it." Christopher Barry was an experienced director who had done good work before, so of course he was brought back.

Unfortunately, this time he turns out to be a poor choice. He makes two crushing mistakes, both of which Tat Wood is exactly on target about. The first is that he egregiously misreads what to do with the bandits and ends up depicting them as horrible Jewish stereotypes. Even if the script didn't have something considerably more clever in mind (and it does), the anti-Semitic stereotyping would be unbearable. Then he fails to understand the final episode, turning it into a ten-minute confrontation between Adrasta and Erato followed by a fifteen-minute mini-episode about stopping a different threat.

In fact, both of these are the same error. Fisher's script is doing something fairly complicated that Barry fails to recognize. The key thing is a point related to one of the things we discussed alongside Thatcher's rise: the way in which both sides of an apparent political debate were in one sense indistinguishable because they both adhered to the same premise. The example there was the way in which the trade unions, Callaghan, and Thatcher all took for granted that maximizing profit was the right thing to do. The idea that they were opposing sides in many key ways serves more to cut other perspectives out of the debate entirely than it does to actually describe a fundamental philosophical difference between them. And this sort of false opposition is exactly what Fisher is trying to do with the culture of Chloris, but Barry completely misses it.

Essential to this story is the fact that at first glance it looks like something other than what it is. The Doctor has been showing up on planets with a powerful ruling class and a bunch of oppressed quasi-savages for, well, seventeen seasons now. And in virtually every case, assuming the quasi-savages are human-looking, he sides with the savages in overthrowing the government. This means that, in theory, the bandits should default to looking like the good guys, and in fact, Fisher's script assumes just that.

Done correctly, the bandits would have looked like the usual batch of oppressed miners, only played just a little too angrily – essentially in the mold of Arthur Scargill, the future president of the National Union of Mineworkers. The bandits' leader should have been a seedy leader whose angry populist rhetoric is subtly undermined by his callousness and his greed. Instead we get John Bryans doing obsequious comedy in which he makes unwise comments about his personal wealth and then reassures his stupid henchmen that he cares about them.

If one imagines the script being executed in a manner more or less akin to what Fisher seems to have written, the idea suddenly becomes much clearer. The trick is in the title. Plenty of people have commented on the two moments in the script in which Adrasta rather dramatically delivers the lines, "We call it... the pit," and, "We call it... the creature." These lines are generally pointed to as the moments in which we're meant to see how blinkered and narrow-minded

Adrasta is, and that's clearly the case. But what all of this misses is the third moment in the script in which the joke is used: the title. If calling it "the pit" and "the creature" is evidence of a lack of imagination or open-mindedness, surely we are meant to notice that the title commits the exact same error.

Again we get the sense that the point is, in part, to trick the viewer into thinking that it's a different story than it is. The audience is supposed to assume that the creature is, in fact, a monster in a pit that eats people. Even when we do start to figure out that the creature isn't evil, we're supposed to assume that it's just a craven remake of the *Star Trek* episode "Devil in the Dark."

Ah, yes, the *Star Trek* episode. Miles suggests in his review that the critical divide on this story is whether it's bad science fiction or a parody of bad science fiction. It's an ironic divide to make, in that, like the episode, it presents a false debate in which both sides are really on the same side of a different debate entirely. The truth is that this story has no conscious relationship to bad science fiction one way or another. It's quite good science fiction that just happened to be made badly. But all the same, there's no way around the fact that it has some sort of relationship to this particular *Star Trek* episode, if only because it makes fairly explicit references to it.

But what's inexplicable about Miles's attack on this story is that he for some reason thinks that the audience is supposed to get that this story is recycling a *Star Trek* plot. Sure, there are some cute nods in place if the audience does in fact get it, but it's no more essential to have seen "Devil in the Dark" to get this story than it is to have read *The Prisoner of Zenda* to get *The Androids of Tara*. In fact, those who don't see the similarities right off the bat are going to be in a better position because they're more likely to be tricked into thinking that the Creature is in fact a straightforward monster. This isn't literary parody, it's a good ol' fashioned ripoff that's been spruced up to have a better moral.

The only way in which the *Star Trek* story is in some way requisite to following this one is indirectly, which is that *Star Trek* itself falls for the second red herring in the script. The problem with *Star Trek*'s world, in a nutshell, is that it depicts a galaxy of utter cultural hegemony. There's the monoculture of the federation, i.e. New Frontier liberalism, and that's it. So in "Devil in the Dark" the default assumption – never challenged anywhere in the entire story – is that what the miners are doing on the planet is necessary. The "monster" in the mine turns out to have utterly defensible motives as well, sure, but everything comes down to a misunderstanding – the nice miners didn't realize the Horda was basically human.

But here that's a red herring, too. Even as we start to figure out that the creature isn't hostile, our default assumption is supposed to be that Adrasta and company just don't understand it. Especially because Adrasta is apparently so blinkered – of course she doesn't get an alien culture and has just chained up the creature in a pit. But in truth what's going on is subtler than that. Adrasta actually understood what Erato was just fine. The problem is that she didn't care. She was only willing to look at the world from her own capitalist perspective.

Whereas Erato – and note that the name is picked not just from Greek myth but specifically for the muse of love and erotic poetry, suggesting a specific sense of love and harmony – could care less. What Erato was going for all along was to create a symbiotic relationship between two planets with complimentary sets of needs. In other words, the entire point of the story is not, in fact, "Erato was just like us," but, "We never needed to be so obsessed with mining in the first place and the entire basis of our economy and culture was flawed." The point is that profit as understood on Chloris was simply wrong, and that there was another way. Adrasta did misunderstand, not because she didn't recognize Erato's individual subjectivity, but rather because she didn't recognize the flaws of her own worldview.

The reason, of course, is that she's a selfish arch-capitalist who is perfectly happy to thrive while everyone else suffers. Here I should pause and point out a particularly galling error in *About Time*, in which Miles and Wood do a takedown of another critic, John Fiske, who argues that Adrasta is a Thatcher stand-in. Given that the story was written in the midst of the general election, this is fairly ludicrous. Yes, it was made before Thatcher was Prime Minister, but I think one can pretty safely make the connection; after all, she was the odds-on favorite to win the election. It's not exactly a stretch to think that a female arch-capitalist ruler written in the middle of Thatcher's campaign might be inspired by her somehow.

But to wander back towards the other error that Barry makes, he misses that the entire resolution of the story, where the bandits and Karela, even after Adrasta is defeated, still remain stuck in the capitalist mode. The entire point of this resolution is that Adrasta isn't a special or unique villain, but merely the point at the top of an entire society that is diseased and unable to understand that alternatives exist. The real resolution isn't Adrasta getting her comeuppance – which was inevitable given all the sneering about she does over the whole story. Overthrow Adrasta and someone else will take her place. No, the resolution is the moment where the Doctor blows up a massive pile of metal in order to demonstrate the folly of short-term materialism in response to the failings of the entire planet.

But the script and execution land miles apart. That said, even the execution isn't quite as bad as people give it credit for. Other than Romana obviously being written for Mary Tamm (and it's worth noting that at least some of the problem here is that this was actually Ward's first story in the part and so we're seeing her suddenly losing two months of experience playing the role), most of what's highlighted as a flaw here just isn't a problem. Yes, the *Everest in Easy Stages/Teach Yourself Tibetan* joke is a bit silly, but to blame Douglas Adams for it is unfair – the joke that Baker's Doctor has all sorts of strange things in his pockets has been running since *Genesis of the Daleks*, after all. For a six-year running gag, that's a pretty good instance. And Erato isn't nearly as bad a prop/costume as people say. Not a triumph of design by any stretch, but the novelty of moving away from men in rubber suits counterbalances the flaws. The wolfweeds, on the

other hand, are positively charming. And while it's tempting to rag on David Brierly's K-9, to do so would require positing that it was ever possible to fill John Leeson's shoes to begin with.

No, if anything we should be praising Douglas Adams here. He turned in what is probably Doctor Who's best-written script ever, took at least some of the rough edges off of a Terry Nation script, and helped supervise a fantastic script here, albeit one that was badly sandbagged by the director. In the two stories where his hand has been most visible – this and *City of Death* – he's managed to create worlds where the rules and nature of the world matter and where the action is character-driven instead of spectacle-driven. Far from his reputation as a chaotic and hands-off script editor who mostly left things alone, it's quite clear that he's been successfully stamping his vision on the program, and the program is unmistakably better for it, whatever other flaws may still exist.

Maybe That Idea Came From Somewhere (*Nightmare of Eden*)

It's November 24, 1979. Dr. Hook's beautiful woman obsession continues for two more weeks before the Police break up the party with "Walking on the Moon." That lasts for a week before Pink Floyd takes the top slot with "Another Brick in the Wall." Kool and the Gang, Donna Summer and Barbara Streisand, Gary Numan, and the Sugarhill Gang also chart, making this, I think, a strong contender for the most utterly screwed up set of musical options ever.

In real news, Air New Zealand Flight 901 crashes into Mount Erebus in Antarctica. Bruce George Peter Lee sets fire to a house in Hull, killing three and setting off a large manhunt. Jack Lynch resigns as Taoiseach of Ireland (which is by far the best name for a major political office ever), and the whole Rhodesia thing continues with the short-lived and unrecognized state of Zimbabwe Rhodesia returning to British control as Southern Rhodesia. Smallpox is formally eliminated, there's a coup d'etat in South Korea, and the first Star Trek movie debuts.

While on television we have a story that is nobody's favorite. As with much of the Williams era there are self-evident flaws. In a pleasant surprise, given that this is a Bob Baker solo script, the writing isn't one of them, and the frantic Douglas Adams rewrites that characterize this season elevate it to solid quality. The Mandrels are, of course, a disaster, although at least with them, unlike several other recent monsters, you can see why people thought they could have worked. They're firmly a case of just missing scary and landing on ridiculous (and the two are often a hair's breadth apart) as opposed to a misconceived disaster. The acting is often poor, though nobody stands out as particularly awful. The sets are... generic 70s space ship at its most generic, although some points are on offer for a relative lack of white.

But the biggest problem, if we're being honest, is the basic concept. The number of series that have had good days with anti-drug stories is very, very small. It's not a great topic, largely because one can't deviate from the proscribed moral position that drugs are super-duper bad. Lacking in any ability to say or do anything interesting with the material, it becomes little more than a race to see how ludicrously anti-drug you can end up being. So for Bob Baker to falter here is hardly surprising. Heck, even Steven Moffat has trouble with this theme, with "How to Make a Killing," his anti-drug episode of *Press Gang*, being by far one of the weakest episodes of the series. Still, the fact that a vraxoin high consists of emotional apathy followed by death means that this has to be considered an impressive entry in the ludicrously excessive anti-drug story sweepstakes. And given that vraxoin is one of the story's big ideas and that another one of its big ideas is nothing more than a less interesting lift of *Carnival of Monsters* it's easy to

see why this story is a bit underwhelming.

But, thankfully, and here's something we've rarely gotten to say over his Doctor Who career, this is a Bob Baker story. Which means that there are more than two big ideas in it. While the first two are lackluster, the third one is actually quite interesting. This is a little bit surprising on the surface, because it seems like it's by far the least interesting. When you've got drugs that are made out of the corpses of dead aliens and a reskinning of the Miniscope in your story, the bit about two spaceships crashing into each other seems utterly lackluster. And yet it's the one that really stands out.

It is easy, especially when you're the sort of person prone to sitting at a keyboard for hours at a time banging out strings of letters, to fail to think adequately about the visual dimension of television. And it is especially easy to overlook the visual components of older television. There's something alienating about watching something that looks old, because so much of the pacing is wrong to modern tastes, and, perhaps most significantly, because technological changes continually alter how the visuals work in the first place, so it's easy to fail to think much about the way in which a story is told visually. And if you're Bob Baker (or Dave Martin, to be fair) that's a bit of a pity, because it means that none of your scripts are really adequately appreciated anymore.

There are many, many ways in which Bob Baker is not a great writer. His dialogue is clunky, his characters are shallow, and his plots are meandering. But on the other hand, it's not like he hasn't written three Oscar-winning films. True, the Oscars went to Nick Park, the director of the Wallace and Gromit films, but Baker did write them. And looking at them, what's clear is that they are intensely visual pieces. Every single scene is based primarily on revealing information and telling the story via what happens on screen – which isn't surprising, given that part of the fun of Wallace and Gromit is meant to be seeing what Nick Park can do with stop-motion. But it's worth stressing just how visual the scripts are. Other than the feature-length *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, all of Baker's Wallace and Gromit scripts have at most two speaking characters. They're not just heavily visual scripts, in other words, they're scripts that are completely structured around the notion of visual storytelling.

Which means, first of all, that Baker was always going to be a bit of a rough choice of writers for BBC television. This is clear enough in the descriptions of his early scripts, with their giant skulls in Hyde Park and flaming death carrots. What Baker was good at was coming up with amazing things to put on the screen. This is key. He's usually credited with having a lot of ideas, but a perusal of his scripts shows that, actually, he doesn't have that many different ones. The key thing to realize is that the things Baker generates aren't really ideas in the first place. If they were, he'd explore them considerably more than he does. No, he comes up with images. Which was not really feasible most of the time given Doctor Who's budget – hence the ruthless reining in of his scripts to be about fewer things.

Even still, Baker consistently shows more concern for the question of

what's happening than most writers. His stories are unusually focused on the episodic structure, making sure that each week the story does something tangibly different from the week before. Even when pacing within an episode is confused or muddy there's always a sense that Baker and Martin stories are built with their episode structures in mind and with a conscious brief to make every episode into a concrete event in its own right. (This again does their reputation no favors in the modern age of the DVD – more than any other writers of the 70s, their work is simply not made to be watched in one go.)

But their best scripts have always been the ones in which the matter of what happens is not merely a question of plot points but of visual events. *The Claws of Axos* – still in many ways their best story – works because it is a continual bevy of fascinating visual experiences. Even in *The Armageddon Factor* the best moments are the ones relating to the slowly expanding time loop, which makes for unusual and interesting television. And it's important to note that this gets at one of the most fundamental things about what the series is. From the first moment of the bizarre and shrieking theme music, Doctor Who defined itself as a place in the television schedule in which unusual things happened. Remember, the TARDIS was initially defined in terms of television, and indeed its initial brief was to create televisual spaces for the strange, the weird, and the peculiar. Looking at the early single episode titles of Doctor Who it's striking how many describe places instead of events: "The Cave of Skulls," "The Dead Planet," "The Wall of Lies," "The Screaming Jungle," "The Temple of Evil," etc.

In this context the collided spaceships of *Nightmare of Eden* are an impressive return to form for Baker. The idea of merged and overlapping ships with patches of unstable space is fascinating in part because of how it dissects the world of the story into visually and conceptually distinct spaces. It's something that's lacking in most of the stories around it – look how the Doctor runs through different parts of the spaceship, moving through the passenger sections (which are couched firmly in terms of airplanes) into jungles or tangles of wires and machinery. What's interesting isn't just the plot that's happening, but the confused and tangled spaces where it happens and how the various parts of the ships juxtapose and affect each other. Or, to put it another way, what's interesting here is how the idea of the crashed spaceships and the on-screen image are indistinguishable from one another. That's distinct from, say, *City of Death*, where the concept (an alien running an outlandish art fraud) and the events (Tom Baker and Julian Glover delivering brilliant wisecracks) are related but distinct. The crashed spaceships and what happens on screen around them can't be meaningfully separated.

Unfortunately Baker is hamstrung by the same thing that usually kills his scripts, which is that the BBC just isn't anywhere close to being able to do his ideas justice, and that he isn't enough of a television guy to know how to use his capacity to come up with odd images that the BBC can actually do. But it's notable how similar the collided starships are to the sort of eccentric narrative spaces that show up in *Castrovalva* in just two seasons' time.

The other and larger problem is that he's stuck in the Williams era when the entire structure of the show runs counter to what he's good at. The series is, for better or for worse, utterly dominated by Tom Baker right now. When it succeeds it's because it finds interesting things for Tom Baker to do, and generally that means finding someone interesting for him to talk to. *City of Death*'s quality is largely down to Tom Baker constantly having someone interesting to play with. When *Creature from the Pit* is good it's because Tom Baker is getting to carry on an interesting conversation with either Adrasta or Erato. And the sort of story Bob Baker is good at is exactly wrong for Tom Baker at this stage.

But the thing is, much as it would be easy to slag Bob Baker here for the same reasons that Christopher Barry and Terry Nation were found wanting, I can't. For one thing, he's not past his prime: he's got three Oscar winning pieces ahead of him in his career. For another, he's not even past his prime on Doctor Who. One of the things that the Nathan-Turner era does is move back towards a style of storytelling in which concept and event are synonymous. As poor a match as Baker's scripts are for the late Williams era, they're surprisingly in touch with what's going to be going on in just a few stories' time. Even though this is his last script and he's been behind some weak stories for several seasons now, the problem is first and foremost that his style is a poor mesh with the Williams era.

But this becomes a criticism that cuts both ways. On the one hand, Baker's clunky dialogue, meager characterization, and the degree to which his writing relies on an effects budget and level of skill that the BBC just couldn't provide have hamstrung him. But on the other hand, at least some of the blame has to go to Williams for letting the show get to the point where it essentially has only one arrow in its quiver. It works when it can do intelligent comedy based around Tom Baker. When it can't, it doesn't. Doctor Who used to be a show that could do anything. Now it can do one thing. When it does it well, it's as good as anything on television. But a show that can only do one thing isn't one that makes it to a seventeenth season, little yet an eighteenth.

Through an Endless Shifting Maze (*The Horns of Nimon*)

It's December 22nd, 1979. Pink Floyd is at number one with "Another Brick in the Wall." This lasts for three more weeks before The Pretenders, the most British band ever to have a vocalist from Akron, Ohio, take number one with "Brass in Pocket." ABBA, KC and the Sunshine Band, and Paul McCartney also chart. The latter, it should be noted, charts with "Wonderful Christmastime," which is one of the single worst Christmas songs ever written – a piece of mawkish offal that makes me long for dogs barking "Jingle Bells" within seconds of it coming on. It is a song so bad that it was held off from the Christmas #1 by six separate songs including The Sugarhill Gang "Rapper's Delight." A song, in other words, so bad that the Brits preferred rap music to it in 1979 for Christmas. And yet Paul McCartney gets half a million dollars a year from royalties on it. Thatcher wasn't the worst thing to happen in 1979.

In real news, a ceasefire is signed for Rhodesia. The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, which makes a lot of people angry and causes no end of problems, many of them for the United States. Speaking of the United States, they give Chrysler a $1.5 billion bailout, because that's just how we roll. And the GPS epoch begins. Shortly thereafter, the President of Sicily is killed by the Mafia. Coincidence? Well, it's tough to figure out how it wouldn't be.

While on television, it's *The Horns of Nimon* – a story that gives even the staunchest defenders of the Williams era pause. This is not a story that anybody tries to defend the production of as such. The defense of the story, such as it is, amounts to, "Well, it's supposed to be funny."

To be fair, it often is. Certainly someone took an active decision here to just let Tom Baker lark about for the entire story while turning the actual "Doctor" role of the story over to Lalla Ward. And certainly Graham Crowden is far too good an actor to treat his performance as anything other than deliberate. Josh Marsfelder describes this story as a "Ham Singularity," and if I am to disagree it is only because I worry that it may suck up the entire world's cured meat supply. Crowden's performance has a sufficient amount of ham involved that it borders on the anti-Semitic. The design flaws of the Nimon, on the other hand, may be inadvertent, but if so it's an accident that at least fits seamlessly with the rest of the episode.

Is it actually funny? That, of course, is a matter of pure subjectivity. And it forms the basis of the traditional Miles and Wood dispute here. Miles's objection boils down to, "It's not funny." Wood's defense, to its credit, attempts to sail past that debate towards, "Actually it's quite serious," but in doing so runs afoul of the point underlying both of their arguments that accounts for what's really going on here. It is, in essence, the exact opposite of what was going on in

Creature from the Pit, where we had a very good script that was marred by the fact that the production team couldn't execute it to save their lives. This time we have the production team executing the best possible rescue plan for a script that it is simply impossible to save.

Absolutely everything about this script is wrong. Miles identifies the worst of it in terms of its conception of Greek myth. The value of myth in genre storytelling is that it's an opportunity to make things bigger. Myths are stories of gods and demons and fundamental forces of the universe. Even if you go for more modern mythic constructions like Sherlock Holmes or Tarzan you're dealing with stories that work because they're based around extremes of human experiences – the idea of the smartest man there can possibly be or of a primal state of nature that still exists in the world.

So when you just do myth as literary pastiche where the sole purpose of the mythic content is to show how clever you are – as is happening here, as happened in *Underworld*, and as happened, to a more limited extent, in *The Armageddon Factor* – well, it's more than a bit flat. Especially when it comes in on the post-*Star Wars* "mythic science fiction" tradition. There's a clear assumption on the part of the script that just because this looks like a Greek myth it must be meaningfully epic. And not only isn't it, it's embarrassingly not. To give Lawrence Miles, who has done a few spells as a punching bag lately, his real due, the original myth of the Minotaur is "a tale of everything animalistic and Freudian in human consciousness, about a journey into the darkest, guiltiest tunnels of our collective psyche," whereas this is "about a bull-headed alien who fires energy bolts from its horns and lives in the middle of some space-corridors."

And therein lies the problem. This is once again Doctor Who trying to do *Star Wars* not only without the budget but without any understanding of what doing *Star Wars* means in the first place. The script seems to genuinely believe that if you have spaceships and allusions to myth then nothing else is required. If you've got a world-class special effects team backing you up then you can maybe get away with this, though frankly even Lucas only tried that exact trick once, coming up with new approaches for the subsequent *Star Wars* films. (And to its credit, *The Empire Strikes Back* is cleverer, but Lucas's next trick after that was Ewoks, and it's been all downhill ever since.)

So with no ability to execute it competently and nothing to execute competently anyway the series falls back on the last resort of the screwed over: comedy. To blame the story for having enough ham to kill the entire Cass family is to ignore the fact that every single other option would have been worse. The real question is why the hell this script was even being made in the first place.

Tat Wood suggests that this story amounts to "clearing the decks" and trying to kill off every single cliché imaginable so that nobody would try this sort of crap again, with the idea being that the series would then be born anew with *Shada*. Several problems arise with this theory. First of all, Graham Williams had, by all appearances, already decided to quit during the production of *Nightmare of*

Eden, so treating this as a deliberate effort to clear the deck is a stretch. Second of all, the basic idea of accepting a script just to highlight how bad all of its ideas are, in an effort to get people to stop doing scripts like that anymore, is simply moronic. If Williams and company actually set out to make a crap episode of Doctor Who, that's not a defense of the story, it's a reason for everyone involved to be sacked for wasting license payers' money.

No, this was a commission of desperation. Its sole virtue was that it was in less bad shape than the other five stories being considered, none of which Christopher Bidmead saw fit to try to rescue for the next season, either. (Admittedly Bidmead had a fairly unusual vision of what the series was, but the fact that neither Douglas Adams nor Christopher Bidmead saw the scripts as workable is... not a good sign for those scripts. As interesting as some of them sound, it's tough to believe they were workable at all.) And, given that it's the end of the Williams era, at least in one sense, we may as well use this fact to start our post-mortem.

In many ways it's the next story that provides the most complete and perfect metaphor for the Williams era: a story comprised of brilliant ideas that completely fell apart for reasons largely beyond everyone's control. But let's give the late Mr. Williams *Shada* as a victory lap and use this one to discuss, in essence, where it all went wrong for this era. Despite all its potential and occasional outright glory, this is an uneven and troubled period for the program.

All the same, it's worth starting with the high notes. Much of what is going on in the Williams era is scintillatingly good. It's largely the smartest the series has ever been, which is impressive coming off of the Hinchcliffe era. All but eight stories of it are script-edited by two of the best writers the classic series has ever had, both of them contenders for the outright title of "best writer of Doctor Who ever." It has one of the greatest Doctors in it, and when Mary Tamm is your weakest link in the supporting cast you're clearly in phenomenal shape there, too. Everything should be on track for a legendarily good era.

And yet the result is strangely uneven. Out of seventeen stories it has three that nobody ought to think less of you for declaring to be the best Doctor Who story of all time (*The Ribos Operation*, *City of Death*, and *Horror of Fang Rock*). A solid majority of the stories are at the very least quite good. Its horrific low points are indeed horrific and low, and, more damningly, unusually frequent, but there's relatively few stories with no redeeming value. No, the truth is that to look at the quality of what's on screen to explain the Williams era's troubled reputation is to look in the wrong place.

As I said previously, most of the real loathing towards the Williams era was badly exacerbated by the fan-industrial complex. And it was utterly shameful. John Nathan-Turner got the producer's job on Graham Williams's recommendation alone: Nathan-Turner wasn't viewed as having enough experience (hence Barry Letts being brought back as executive producer for Season Eighteen) and it was purely because Williams vouched for him that he got the gig. For him to throw Williams under a bus as thoroughly as he did is

redeemed only by his noble decision in 1985 to oversee an era of the program so bad as to immediately replace the Williams era in everyone's mind as the nadir of the series. Nevertheless, the damage had been done.

It's worth noting, however, that there's nothing like a consensus that the Williams era is deeply flawed. Gareth Roberts, in his essay "Tom the Second," mounts an impassioned defense of the Williams era that centers roughly on the fact that it's very, very fun and that it has better characters than other eras. On both counts he's got a strong point. Not since the anarchic glee of Patrick Troughton have we had this clear a sense that the Doctor does what he does for the sheer love of it. And as we said with regards to *City of Death*, there's something very powerful to that. However compelling his moral sense and tortured psyche may be – and I love both those aspects – at the end of the day the Doctor is always a better character if the audience buys how much he loves what he's doing.

And the characters in this era have been quite good. Attention is reliably paid to things like motivation. The villains aren't bad just because that's how they are; they have quasi-sensible reasons for what they do. The worst villains are consistently bad not because they're raving psychopaths but because they're boring and closed-minded. Even the Daleks, for better or for worse, get reinvented away from being raw and seething evil and find themselves stuck in an existential crisis about the limitations of their nature, which is something of the sort that nobody has bothered with since David Whitaker was writing them. And perhaps most importantly, more often than not it's been funny. Yet for all of that, it's hard to argue with the sense of the era as frustrating.

One problem, certainly, is the program's declining budget. *The Horns of Nimon* is in this regard typical: the script asks for things the production team can't actually pull off. But even in this regard, Williams deserves more credit than he gets. He was dealt a staggeringly bad hand, and he played it quite well. Faced with perpetual and searing budget crises and a mandate to stop doing what had been working under Philip Hinchcliffe, Graham Williams was, in fact, able to develop a brilliant approach to Doctor Who that combined punk sensibilities, postmodern storytelling, and intelligent but broadly accessible humor. The only problem was that he just couldn't find a stable of writers who could execute it.

This, actually, is going to be the biggest problem for Doctor Who from now until the Cartmel era. Nobody is going to be able to find a large enough pool of writers to consistently turn out quality material. Say what you like about the Pertwee era, but Barry Letts and Terrance Dicks could count to five. Almost every season they acted sensibly and put a Malcolm Hulke story in, a Robert Holmes story in, the obligatory Sloman/Letts script (for better or for worse), and a Baker and Martin story. That put them at four stories that would almost certainly range from serviceable to quite good every year. Even when Baker and Martin or Holmes skipped a year or someone coughed up a bad script there was enough depth on the bench that no season taken as a whole was embarrassing. Similarly, the Hinchcliffe era had a deep enough pool of writers (and a script

editor suicidal enough to do two scripts a season) that it very rarely found itself in catastrophe territory.

But the Williams era? They almost immediately lost one A-list writer to *Blake's 7* when Chris Boucher was (quite rightly) grabbed to be the script editor. Then they lost Robert Holmes to boot. Their successful additions were good – David Fisher is a solid, reliable writer and Douglas Adams is a genius. But at their high point they had three writers who could deliver a script that worked in the mould they were shooting for. Most of the time, they had two. When you have to produce six stories a year, two or three writers just isn't enough.

You can blame things like the way in which they drove Holmes off, but every era has lost good writers to frustration. Complaining about how Holmes shouldn't have been put on a brief as wretched as *The Power of Kroll* because they needed him makes as much sense as complaining about Malcolm Hulke being driven off by the fact that he preferred writing novelizations to seeing his scripts get let down by the BBC's inability to do giant lizards. It happens: writers burn out. The problem was simply that by all appearances there just weren't enough writers in the UK who could do a script as complex as the Williams era required. Adams went canvassing for them, and still ended up having to make a Terry Nation story. As a result, every single season of the Williams era started off with a massive handicap. It was usually a challenge to get past three good scripts.

And when that's true, you're in a very, very vulnerable position when other things go wrong. Bad things happen to good scripts, but when you have enough good scripts you still end up at an acceptable level of quality. But under Williams, when Chris Boucher turns in a weak effort or David Fisher's script gets mauled by the director on top of everything else, it's a crisis instead of a run-of-the-mill problem. But really, what were they going to do? It's not like Bidmead or Saward had a more straightforward time getting enough competent writers on the program. It's not like they were hiring writers who turned out a good script and then not hiring them for more. The writers who were good got more commissions. It's just that doing so never got you to six good scripts. Yeah, it would have been nice if Boucher had been script editor of Doctor Who instead of being wasted on *Blake's 7* and if Robert Holmes hadn't been pissed off. Let Anthony Read, who is apparently a weak writer himself, go work for Terry Nation. They deserved each other.

When all is said and done, the real problem is that there just weren't the writers out there. Sure, one can think of a couple of options from British TV of the same era who it would have been great to see on Doctor Who. But frankly, most of them were good enough to run their own shows. I mean, yes, PJ Hammond would have written a fantastic Doctor Who story. But why would he bother when he had *Sapphire and Steel*? Sure, Tanith Lee would have been far better on Doctor Who than *Blake's 7*, but was she going to be a good fit under Adams? (Well, actually, probably yes. So that's one lost opportunity. But on the other hand, they had the good sense to try Christopher Priest, so let's not ding them too hard.)

For the most part one suspects that, no, there probably weren't enough writers who could do what Douglas Adams did. Which, to be fair, is almost always a true statement. But on the other hand, we return to the initial problem the era faced. With Mary Whitehouse closing down one angle for the show, and the budget cratering to where you needed to make science fiction adventures that consisted of people sitting around talking to each other a lot, if you wanted it to look good there weren't a lot of good options on the table. Graham Williams found a model that could work. No, he found a model that did work. He just didn't find enough other people who could do it.

But while this may be the last televised Graham Williams story, there are a few more essays in what might be thought of as the Williams era portion of this book. So let's leave it at this: the Graham Williams era was a crushing disappointment through and through, yes, but it disappoints far more because of how good it could have been than how bad it was. So let's take a few and celebrate the alternative, the Williams era that could have been and almost was, the one that deserves to be celebrated and praised, whether it happened or not.

Time Can Be Rewritten (*Festival of Death*)

There is a strange tendency, within media criticism, to make the idea of intelligent writing something of a double-edged sword. Certainly that feels like the case with much of the Graham Williams era, where pointing out the intellectual roots of many of the stories is generally done as a sort of last defense. Sure, the CSO caves are awful and they hook K-9 up to some binder clips and telephone cords, but *Underworld* has some really great riffs on Greek mythology. Or, to take one I'm guilty of, yes, it features terrible acting and Tom Baker fellating a giant green trash bag, but isn't the anti-capitalist theory behind *The Creature from the Pit* great?

And yet equally, there actually is something to the defense, especially when it comes to Doctor Who. As is surely obvious by this point in the book, the Williams era has some significant problems in a way that honestly isn't true of any previous era of Doctor Who. These problems even include the writing sometimes. But there's a complexity and originality to the stories in this era that's also unique. Even in the Hinchcliffe era, which plenty of people would argue is the high point of the series, there's a formulaic nature to stories. A terrible evil from the past that everyone thought was dead threatens to return, there's some bodily possession, and the Doctor defeats it. That describes fifty percent of both Seasons Thirteen and Fourteen. And you can't do that nearly as easily for the Williams era. For better or for worse, there's a lot of originality here.

So it's not surprising, in many ways, that novels prove the era's salvation. Astute readers may note that we haven't actually covered any novels up to this point in the book. Instead they're all crammed here, in one big stretch at the end of the era. (And properly, they really should all go one after another, as this novel specifies that it's set after *Shada*, but I really like the uninterrupted cluster of Gareth Roberts there, so I bumped this up slightly.) Part of that is idiosyncratic – I certainly could have looked at a book with Leela or Mary Tamm's Romana, for instance. But it's also because, more than any era save Colin Baker's run, the Graham Williams era is one that has been extensively relitigated and revisited by later writers, particularly in the Wilderness Years, but also in the post-Wales era. And that process seemed worth looking at as a coherent thing instead of in bits and bobs across the book.

Some of these revisitations have been audios, as we've already discussed, but between Baker being a late addition to the Big Finish lineup and the Wilderness Years (and later) work of Gareth Roberts, who has in many ways defined his career in part in terms of his Williams-era reworkings, it's mainly novels in which this has taken place. But before we get to Gareth Roberts, who is going to pop up in three of the final four Williams era entries, let's look at the

phenomenon of Williams-era novels on their own, or, at least, through someone who is not Gareth Roberts, specifically Jonathan Morris and his much-praised *Festival of Death*.

Let's first of all note that novels are a really good medium for the Williams era. For one thing, the Williams era was particularly literary, what with it being overseen in part by Douglas Adams and with its (unfortunately failed) attempts to get writers like Christopher Priest in. For another, novels allow this era to simply sidestep what was, on the screen, one of its biggest problems, namely that its reach often exceeded its grasp. *The Invasion of Time* was famously put into production after a script was abandoned due to the realization that it was going to require a night shoot at an arena the size of Wembley Stadium full of cats; Jonathan Morris's *Festival of Death* can casually throw out a horde of two hundred and seventeen zombies without having to worry about it.

But the thing about *Festival of Death* that really stands out isn't so much what happens in it as the way in which the story is structured. Under the hood it's a bunch of Doctor Who clichés. But the plot is really just an excuse for Morris to engage in a baroque structure. The story features the Doctor and Romana arriving at a space station that's about to self-destruct, only to have everybody already recognize them due to their having just saved the day from a horrible attack of zombies. This is news to the Doctor and Romana, who, after resolving the latest crisis, have to go back in time and have the adventures they've had described to them, adventures which appear to include the Doctor's death. From there, however, they discover that they've had yet another set of adventures, and so have to go back for those adventures too, during which they finally resolve the situation and move on with their lives.

The nature of this plot requires a sort of steady calling back to earlier moments of the book, setting up mysteries with the basic form of "something kind of inexplicable happens, and eventually the Doctor and Romana go back and find out the particulars of the cause." But it works – it's easy to follow and it's funny, making it a joy of a book.

But while *Festival of Death* is clearly more complex than anything seen in the Williams era, it's not that far out of step. Certainly the overlapping timeframes of Christopher Priest's abandoned *Sealed Orders*, at least as described (no script has ever leaked) sounds like it's in the same ballpark. Truthfully, the Williams era has plenty of stories like *City of Death* and *The Ribos Operation* whose plots are not easy to summarize in a single sentence or two. That these are also among the highlights of the era speaks volumes as to its pleasures.

So there's a sense of Morris's novel as a real step on a road from *City of Death* to, say, *Blink*, a progression into which Gareth Roberts clearly fits. But it's a progression that has its roots back in Douglas Adams, whose comedic novels laid a lot of the groundwork for this approach. It's not quite accurate to say that the Williams era aspired to be a Douglas Adams novel, but equally, Adams reworked the plots of *Shada* and *City of Death* to form the first Dirk Gentley novel, and so it's also ridiculous to suggest there's not a common tradition there.

The Williams era is interesting in part as an experiment in making that tradition function on television – an experiment that was not entirely successful, but, to be fair, was no less successful than any of the other iterations of that experiment, such as the actual *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* television series or the appallingly awful film version.

Which leads us nicely into *Shada*, the story in which these themes play, perhaps, the largest part.

No Coordinates, No Dimensional Stabiliser (*Shada*)

Somewhere out of time, in a space between mean and while, in the gap of the conditional, the Graham Williams era does not conclude.

If we were to pretend that this aired after *The Horns of Nimon* we would discover that The Pretenders were at number one with "Brass in Pocket." Two weeks later The Specials would take the top slot with "Too Much Too Young," which would yield after another two weeks to Kenny Rogers with "Coward of the Country." Styx, The Boomtown Rats, Joe Jackson, The Ramones, Blondie, and Elvis Costello would also have charted. Lower in the charts would have lurked Peter Gabriel's divinely good "Games Without Frontiers," which probably would have been in the top ten when this story actually would have aired. (The scrapping of *Shada* is, I would guess, why there was no Christmas break in Season Seventeen. The only reason Sixteen didn't have one was that it was a continual story arc. Season Eighteen had one again. This also rubbishes the idea that The Horns of Nimon was supposed to be a Christmas panto or whatever. In all likelihood the season was supposed to break after *Nightmare of Eden*, with *The Horns of Nimon* being planned for a January start.)

Again assuming a Key to Time sort of scheduling, the London Gold Fixing would have hit its highest price ever, while the same day the Greek ship the MS Athina B (previously the Japanese MS Kojima Maru) beached in Brighton and became a temporary tourist attraction. Israel and Egypt would have established diplomatic relations, and six US diplomats would have escaped Iran by pretending to be Canadian. (A fun fact: did you know that "Canadian" is actually a racist slur in some parts of the US? Apparently people use it in place of "blacks," as in, "The neighborhood has gone downhill since all the Canadians moved in.") The Winter Olympics would have opened in Lake Placid, and the famed Miracle on Ice would have happened. A coup in Suriname would take place, the Voyager 1 probe would confirm the existence of the Saturnian moon Janus, and Robert Mugabe would be elected Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, bringing an end to the whole Rhodesia problem and beginning a whole new problem.

While on television there is… not *Shada*. There is something else. *Shada*, like the eponymous Time Lord prison, remains a half-constructed phantom. Or perhaps more accurately, an over-constructed phantom. There are a wealth of versions of *Shada* floating around now, which we'll deal with in the next essay: the actual original script, the John Nathan-Turner-produced video, the Paul McGann audio/animated version, the Ian Levine-produced animation, the fan-produced novelization, the Gareth Roberts novelisation, and Douglas Adams's own salvaging of it into *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*. But of course the

most important one is the version that we imagine. Like the legendary lost epics of Hartnell and Troughton there is a version of this story that exists only as the wish of what might have been.

This last version is the most problematic. Doubly so because of just how good this one seems like it could have been. There are things that are difficult to accept as a Doctor Who fan: the fact that we will likely never see Patrick Troughton's first episode, or the first appearance of Nicholas Courtney as Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart. But there is perhaps nothing quite so galling as knowing that we are only fifty-five minutes short of a Douglas Adams story. And, unlike *Power of the Daleks* Episode One or *The Web of Fear* Episode Three, there's not even audio of it. *Shada* is not merely lost or missing, it is absent – a gaping, crushing, and mocking wound in Doctor Who.

It's tempting to say that it could not possibly have been as good as we hope. Certainly the sections that exist reveal their flaws. Christopher Neame is a bit of a damp squib as Skagra, a villain who positively drips with lethargy. But then, we see little enough of him and he's stuck striding around Cambridge wearing a tragic bit of 1980. Perhaps his appearances in episodes 3-6, which are almost entirely absent, would have been more impressive.

On the other hand, there are ways in which John Nathan-Turner did the story no favors in the video production (which is the most generally available version and the main one used for this essay). The most criticized aspect is the insertion of Keff McCulloch's score. McCulloch has the unfortunate but frankly largely deserved reputation as being the worst thing ever to happen to Doctor Who's incidental music, and he outdoes himself here. In particular, the dramatic orchestral stab in the middle of Professor Chronotis's "one lump or two… sugar?" joke is more or less the musical equivalent of *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*'s giant rat.

But there are frustrations that go beyond that. Tom Baker's preposterously self-indulgent introduction is unfortunate, although to be fair it could well have had nothing to do with Nathan-Turner. But my God, the script for his inserts is bewildering, especially if you read along with the actual script for the trimmed bits. One gets the sense that even in 1992 John Nathan-Turner didn't understand the Williams era. He recycles lines of dialogue in the narration – fair enough. But inexplicably he drops all of funny bits of Douglas Adams's dialogue while not only maintaining large swaths of Skagra's megalomaniacal rantings but transposing them from what, in the script, are visibly intended to be the delusional ramblings of a genocidal madman, into entirely straight-faced descriptions of Skagra's plans.

But what would a "good" version of *Shada* entail anyway? Not the Paul McGann version (nobody but Tom Baker can really deliver those lines), not Levine's leaked animated version (even if it did have most of the correct cast), not Roberts's novelization (despite him being the great lost writer of the Graham Williams era). Because really, *Shada* is a story, more than any other, defined by its absence. It's the final cruelty of the Graham Williams era's failure to launch. It's

the story that, through its non-existence, denies Williams the climactic send-off that would have justified his tenure.

Of course, that reading is as nonsensical as the others. Certainly the view of *Shada* as showing "what could have been" is rubbish. Adams was on his way out the door, depriving Williams of yet another one of his good writers. And Williams had already decided to leave. There's no lost Williams version of Season Eighteen for *Shada* to play John the Baptist. And as a crowning achievement for Season Seventeen it runs into a different problem, which is that by all appearances *City of Death* was better. I mean, both are good and full of inventive twists and reversals, but Skagra comes nowhere close to Scaroth as a villain, and the script for *Shada*, dense and charming as it is, lacks anything half as clever as discovering six authentic copies of the Mona Lisa in a basement. *Shada*'s ideas are brilliant, but every one of them is a brilliant sci-fi idea. What's so great about *City of Death* is that one of its central ideas isn't, on the surface, a science fiction idea at all but a completely real-world idea made possible through a science fiction explanation. In practice, it's a heist movie that uses sci-fi explanations instead of cons.

So *Shada* is at once better than any of the manifestations of it that we have and clearly inferior to the heavenly ideal that some have made of it. On top of that we have a bewildering canon debate. I mean, all canon debates in Doctor Who are inherently bewildering because of the basic ludicrousness of Doctor Who canon. But the attempts to adjudicate whether this story "happened," and if so whether it happened to the Fourth or Eighth Doctor, are something of a low point even given that. Indeed, this debate serves to further entrench *Shada*'s odd status as the most absent story. When we speak of *Fury from the Deep* we try to figure out how good it was. The debate centers on reconstructing something that actually existed, not, as with *Shada*, on constructing it in the first place.

Let's abandon, then, trying to "complete" *Shada*. All writing works through ambiguities and gaps, after all. *Shada* need not be treated any differently, save for that its gaps and ambiguities are larger than they might have been. Enough of trying to see what *Shada* could be. Let's look at what is, and what that implies.

The first and most obvious thing is that this story marks the return of the Time Lords from *The Deadly Assassin*. This is in pointed contrast to the alternative, namely the return of the Time Lords from *The Invasion of Time*. Equally pointedly, it does not mark the return of Gallifrey (which did return in *The Invasion of Time*, simply without its inhabitants.) Among the tangle of threads and paths that *The Deadly Assassin* left us with was the image of the Time Lords as an extrapolation of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Here we juxtapose them directly, showing a great and ancient Time Lord ensconced happily in Cambridge. It is unmistakably and directly an invocation of Holmes's conception of the Time Lords.

But it is equally unmistakably an invocation of Adams's own past and interests. We have remarked previously on the odd centrality of Cambridge to the UK cultural export market. Much of this centers on the strange double role

of Cambridge itself. On the one hand it is the very definition of establishment, the second half of "Oxbridge" culture and of the cultural and economic elite in Britain. In a country whose class system is enshrined fundamentally in the structure of government (no failing – the American drive to decouple class and government does nothing to eliminate class and much to sweep it under the carpet) this has real consequences. But on the other hand, Cambridge is always the second half of Oxbridge culture: the young upstart snapping at the heels of Oxford, the eternal second son that will never and can never ascend to the throne. This contradiction sits at the heart of the cultural exports of Cambridge, embodied nowhere so clearly as in figures like John Cleese and Stephen Fry, whose comedic characters are based on the idea of the rogue aristocrat.

Within this tension are a host of reiterations. The Doctor himself embodies this same tension, at once coming from a position of cultural authority and from the position of an outsider. He is mirrored in the story by Professor Chronotis, but what is crucial is that there are two reflections here. On the one hand is the difference between the Doctor's title, an academic achievement, and Chronotis's, a social position: a doctor is simply someone who has completed a degree, but a professor holds a specific job at a specific university. Here, however, Adams intervenes with his usual inversions and satires. Chronotis has retired from being a Doctor to become a mere Professor. His ensconcing himself in the institutional structures of Cambridge does not mark him as superior to the Doctor but as an old man being put out to pasture.

On the other hand is the Doctor's contrast with Salyavin. If Chronotis is a diminished Doctor than Salyavin is a legendary one – the famed master criminal. Much is made of the fact that we are supposed to mistake Skagra for Salyavin until Chronotis's big reveal in episode five, and we are, but the fact that Salyavin is a good guy is hardly hidden from the audience. The Doctor identifies Salyavin as a "boyhood hero" who had "such style, such flair" and is "a bit like me." That the Doctor should be allied with a great criminal cannot be taken as anything like a surprise from Adams, who did after all turn the Doctor into Tom Keating in his last outing. No, Salyavin is clearly a criminal in the great folk hero sense of the word. If the Doctor is on the one hand meant to be anxious about some day turning into Chronotis he is equally on the other clearly meant to hope for having the legacy of Salyavin, some day.

The trick, of course, is that the roles are one and the same, a trick emphasized by the final scene in which the Doctor imagines someday having an outsized legacy among the Time Lords that does not jibe with his own kindly and harmless demeanor. Again we see Adams treating the Doctor as a magnificent fraud. Much like Scaroth turned out to be an uninteresting villain who could be squared away with just one punch, Skagra similarly drops out of the story here, defeated in the end by a fake copy of the Doctor created while the Doctor was pretending to be stupid. The villain, once again, is silly and uninteresting. The real action is all centered on the Doctor.

But you can also see Adams reaching back to *The Deadly Assassin* and the

Hinchcliffe era in other ways. The Time Lords' power is shown to exceed the quality of their civilization. They once again have long-forgotten secrets hidden within their traditions, and to once have had godlike powers coupled with an astonishingly limited and blinkered view of the world. Sure, this is wholly compatible with the Williams era's tendency to show ignorance and insularity as the true sources of danger in the world. However well-meaning the Time Lords are, their failure to understand their own power makes them dangerous in spite of themselves.

But Adams adds something that has been missing in recent years. There is a clear sense of evil in this story, and one that goes far beyond Skagra, who is just another blinkered fool. (There's a delightful scene scripted that Nathan-Turner skips over entirely in the linking narration in which the Doctor dismisses Skagra's predictable tired rantings about trying to take over the universe, only to be told that Skagra has bigger plans… mere moments before Skagra goes into exactly the tired rant that the Doctor predicted.) No, what's interesting here is the implication of dark horrors in the history of the Time Lords. Shada is a truly scary concept – a lost and forgotten Time Lord prison that houses unknown and unknowable terrors. That Salyavin turns out to neither be terrifying nor actually housed in Shada does not erase the larger issue that the very concept of this, or of a stray artifact as powerful as Chronotis's book, is scary. It's been a long time since Doctor Who presented a universe full of ancient and forgotten terrors. Adams not only brings that view of the universe back, he merges it seamlessly with what the program was at the end of season seventeen.

But even when the implied bits of *Shada* are penciled in there is something of a gap around all of this. The connections are drawn, the ethics and aesthetics all set up, the frame put in place, but there's no sense anywhere in the script of the moment in which it would come together and execute what it seems to be pointing towards. For all that *Shada* seems to map out a new and vibrant vision of Doctor Who, it steadfastly does nothing more than map it. It never quite demonstrates it.

Which perhaps explains the tendency of people to treat the story as some lost herald of a never-made golden age of the series. Because even with as much filled in about the story, and even if one assumes that the Shada sequences and the final confrontation would have been as good as could be, in the end *Shada* only suggests how good things could have been. Even if it existed it would be in some sense absent, a marker for a Williams era that never was and never could be.

But on the other hand, particularly today, there has started to be another way of looking at it, because the blueprint suggested by *Shada* is strikingly close to what the modern series has actually become. I do not mean to suggest that Steven Moffat is simply executing the model of Doctor Who offered by *Shada* in a deliberate way or that *Shada* is somehow Moffat's primary inspiration. Rather, I think it's a matter of what we discussed last time about the fact that there just weren't the writers needed to do something like Adams/Williams-style Doctor

Who from 1977-80. Robert Holmes and Douglas Adams could do it only because they were miles ahead of their contemporaries.

But it took, in many ways, the 25 years of television that came between *The Horns of Nimon* and *Rose* before the model that Williams was aspiring towards could be done in the first place. It took a generation of writers who were completely comfortable with making sudden tonal shifts and an audience who could deal with a lengthy scary sequence comprised almost entirely of jokes without the dissonance causing them any problems. Something like *The Time of Angels/Flesh and Stone* is doing almost exactly what *Shada* gestures at – with a very similar conception of the Doctor, his relationship with authority, his relationship with his own legend, and a very similar sense of ancient horror. Similarly, part of what is so compelling about *City of Death* is how much it still, 32 years later, adheres almost perfectly to modern taste and pacing. The fact of the matter is, for all the faults of the Williams era, the things that worked about it proved to be one of the most enduring models of Doctor Who ever.

But even this view falls short somehow. Yes, the Williams era was ahead of its time, but as the cliché goes, more by luck than judgment. You just can't read the Williams era as a couple of visionaries stymied by the fact that nobody else understood what they were doing. There are too many searingly obvious and avoidable failures to give it that much credit. But that doesn't mean that the underlying idea has to be abandoned. What can, I think, be fairly said was that the Williams era is a very, very rough prototype of what turned out to be the future of television. It cannot be credited with inventing that future; it's too far from getting it right. But it must be credited with seeing it, even if through a glass darkly.

And in many ways that makes *Shada* a more fitting monument for it than people give it credit for. Not because of its unfinished nature or its squandered potential, but because it is, in an odd way, the perfect fulfillment of everything the Williams era was. A joke far too clever for anyone to get. Even, seemingly, the people making it…

The *Shada* Variations

The haziness with which the word "version" can be defined makes it impossible to establish a firm answer to the question, "What Doctor Who story has the most different versions?" But between the original script, the John Nathan-Turner led reconstruction with Tom Baker doing linking narration, the Ian Levine animated reconstruction with a Tom Baker impersonator playing the Doctor, the Paul McGann audio, the Gareth Roberts novelization, and Douglas Adams's own reworking of the story as *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, *Shada* has to be a pretty strong contender. This is, one has to admit, slightly ironic – the famous unfinished story is, in fact, the most often finished story of all.

We should, I suppose, start with the script, which serves in many ways as the tomb of what we might call the "real *Shada*," which is to say, the version that conspicuously failed to air in early 1980. However many versions of *Shada* there might be, it is the one felled by an industrial dispute that captures the imagination most. Indeed, had this *Shada* actually existed one imagines every single other version save perhaps *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* would have fallen by the wayside. This is an odd sort of primacy. With five released and "finished" versions of *Shada* existing, that we should obsess over the one that didn't make it is ever so slightly strange – a mark of the fact that *Shada* is, generally speaking, discussed only by die-hard Doctor Who fans for whom televisual narratives produced by the BBC are intrinsically more important than anything else, quality be damned. And so Douglas Adams's script, which is the only *Shada* to pre-date *Shada*'s non-existence, holds a certain primacy. And fair enough. It's a good script, long on clever ideas and good jokes. It would make a good episode, give or take some production decisions. At best, a classic to rival *City of Death*. At worst… the second best story of its season, only because that season happened to have *City of Death*.

Unsurprisingly, given the nature of *Shada* as a textual mystery, many of the subsequent attempts at "finishing" the story have also served to reconstruct the mythical 1980 transmission. The most famous of these is the version with Tom Baker's linking narration, first overseen by John Nathan-Turner for VHS release in 1992, and re-released on DVD some twenty years later. This has become, in effect, the official BBC version of *Shada* as a piece of television. With the missing segments replaced by brief narration that often took lines that were clearly intended as jokes by Adams and reworked them into straight-faced descriptions, this version puts the emphasis overwhelmingly on what's present. It is, in effect, a display case for the sequences completed before the story was abandoned.

As such, it has its flaws. Nathan-Turner's decision to hire McCoy-era composer Kef McCulloch to do incidental music for the sequences is jarring at best. McCulloch's scores are often criticized, and with good reason – they're big,

bombastic synthesizer scores that were painfully of their time, and that time was a good few years before 1992 anyway. His *Shada* music is neither good on its own merits nor a good fit for 1979-filmed television; a particularly grating note is his appalling use of a synth stab to punctuate Professor Chronotis's "one lump or two" joke. All the same, it accomplishes the job that is set up for it: finally, after over a decade, it makes a bunch of filmed Doctor Who available for wide release, allowing people to see the strange artifact that was *Shada*.

In this regard, it contrasts oddly with the other effort to "complete" the existing Shada. This effort requires some amount of explanation, not least because its nature relies on a figure who has only been partially introduced in this volume, namely Ian Levine. Ian Levine is a prominent and exceedingly wealthy Doctor Who fan who was brought on as an unofficial "continuity adviser" by John Nathan-Turner. He possibly co-authored a story in the Colin Baker era, and definitely recorded an infamously awful charity single protesting the decision to put the show on an eighteen month hiatus a few months after said story aired. The next book has an entire essay on him that is, to say the least, not entirely kind to him in its conclusions.

One of the many idiosyncratic things about Ian Levine is that he is bewilderingly adamant that Doctor Who ought to be a television program consisting of twenty-five minute episodes. To the point where he makes his own edits of new series episodes, breaking them down into two twenty-five-minute episodes with cliffhangers. He also, over the years, has been known to spend quite a bit of money making fan films, adding clips featuring the Doctor or other characters to Doctorless spin-off material like *Downtime* (a 90s VHS release using various supporting characters from Doctor Who whose rights weren't held by the BBC), and filming recreations, or, rather, first creations of stories that were only ever mooted as possible concepts, such as the abandoned Robert Holmes effort provisionally titled *Yellow Fever and How to Cure It*. He's even attempted to fund the animated reconstruction of missing episodes over the years, paying for a recreation of "Mission to the Unknown," a one-off featuring the Daleks from the Hartnell era.

So it was not a huge surprise to anybody when Ian Levine decided that he was going to hire animators to create the missing sequences of *Shada* and pay all the actors to record their unfinished dialogue. What was perhaps more surprising was Levine's decision to openly lobby for his version to get an official DVD release. This, in practice, did not happen for a variety of reasons, none of which have been publicly revealed by non-partisan sources, and few of which are likely to be of any surprise to anybody familiar with Levine's career in general. This reconstruction did eventually leak to the Internet, much to Levine's outrage, and has since become the sort of thing that a Doctor Who fan who is familiar with the Internet and is fond of ethical gray areas can find for you and show you, much like a very nice gentleman did for me once so that I could write this bit of this essay.

Where the officially sanctioned release puts the emphasis on the existing

clips, Levine's version almost necessarily shifts it to the reconstructed versions. And there is, admittedly, a fair amount to criticize. Levine couldn't afford to hire Tom Baker, and so the Doctor's lines are delivered by a not-bad impersonator. And the quality of animation that Levine could afford is limited. Faces are reasonably well-rendered, but there's a jerky, awkward quality to the actual movement of actors. The camera movement and editing is competent but idiosyncratic, often making the proceedings look like paper dolls moving over a decently shot backdrop. Some sequences that pan through the sets highlight the often quite good 3D model work, but even this only serves to highlight what isn't as strong. The result is entirely watchable, but is left to constantly highlight what it isn't, namely television produced in 1979.

Some of this could have been cleaned up, of course, with more money. Better animation could have been commissioned (certainly the DVD line has made better), and Tom Baker could have been paid for. But there's also a degree of diminishing returns to all of this. Anyone who has listened to Big Finish's Tom Baker audios knows that Tom Baker just doesn't sound like he did in 1979, and is in his own way as much of a Tom Baker impersonator as the guy Ian Levine hired. Indeed, all of the actors have aged, and there's a tangible disjunction between the voice acting in the animated segments and the acting in the 1979-filmed sections for everybody, what with the thirty years that have passed and all.

Which is to say that at the end of the day, the biggest problem with Ian Levine's animated *Shada* is that it's still fundamentally a project aimed at trying to complete something that could only have been completed in or around 1979. No matter what one does, *Shada* itself is still defined by its absence. Striving to complete it as seamlessly as possible only end up putting more and more attention on what the seams actually are. Any effort to make *Shada* simply a piece of television from 1979 is, in the end, doomed to failure.

This, at least, is what Big Finish realized when they were commissioned by the BBC to do a version of *Shada* for a 2003 webcast. Big Finish opted to make the story from the ground up, cheekily playing off of the decision to use a clip from *Shada* in *The Five Doctors* to propose that the 1979 version of *Shada* was interrupted, and having the Doctor and Romana go back to finish the adventure they'd missed. Instead of using Tom Baker, Big Finish opted for Paul McGann, the then-current Doctor, and aside from Romana and K-9, all the other roles were recast completely.

The result is broadly satisfying. Though the animation is of appreciably lower quality than Levine's (given that it was meant for streaming video in 2003 this is hardly a surprise), at least the story has a coherent singular aesthetic. It dispenses with pretending to be anything other than 2003 web video, and in doing so manages to finally present *Shada* as a story in its own right instead of as an exhibition of existing television. This is in some ways problematic – Gary Russell, the producer of this version, rightly recognizes that there are aspects of the script that will not be clear in the new medium, and he expands and reworks

scenes accordingly, but nobody has ever suggested that Gary Russell is Douglas Adams's equal, and the result is a script with tangibly odd pacing. The overly static images and slowed-down scenes grate. And Paul McGann is in one sense a problem as well. He is too good an actor to give a Tom Baker impersonation, but is stuck with a script that's not written for the way he actually plays the Doctor. This is not the first time that's happened to him at Big Finish, and he has an understandable tendency to phone it in a bit when it happens, which he does here, leaving dialogue that would have been (and, since we can often compare it to existing scenes, was) sharp and witty feeling a bit flaccid.

And yet for all of this, it's a landmark production in its own right. Finally *Shada* exists in a coherent way that simply tells a story. And it is still a quite good story. At the outset, we noted that the unfinished nature of *Shada* makes it difficult to tell how good a story it would have been. The Big Finish adaptation probably ends up at the low end of what *Shada* could have been, but in doing so it demonstrates just how good *Shada* is.

Ultimately, though, the problems with the Big Finish adaptation amount to its desire to try to be a televisual piece of Doctor Who – a problem that plagued the three other webcasts that the BBC did around the same period, two of which we'll cover in later volumes, and none of which were entirely successful, either. No such problem confronts the final two versions of *Shada*, both of which are novels.

The first is the official novelization of the story, produced in 2012 and written by Gareth Roberts. Douglas Adams's three scripts are among the five that never got novelized by Target, as Adams was neither willing to allow someone else to write them nor to write them himself at the price point Target offered. And so there was a clear opportunity which Gareth Roberts, avowed fan of the Williams era that he is, happily stepped up for. But Roberts's novel makes little to no effort to describe the hypothetical experience of watching *Shada*. Instead he takes as his model Douglas Adams's novels, which are after all the medium Adams is best known for his work in. This is, broadly speaking, a sound idea – Roberts, like many writers, owes a heavy debt to Douglas Adams, although his is perhaps heavier than most, and he's adept at capturing the feel of Adams's humor.

Equally, however, Roberts has the sense to avoid a slavish Douglas Adams imitation. Instead he manages a style of his own that's certainly adjacent to Adams, but prone to its own sorts of focus and humor. For instance, early in the novel Roberts writes, "Skagra rested his head, the most important head in the universe, against the padded interior of his alcove and listened to the symphony of agonised screams coming from all around him. He permitted himself two smiles per day, and considered using one of them now. After all, the sounds of wrenching mental anguish and physical distress were a sure sign that his plan was working and that this was going to be a good day, possibly even a 9 out of 10."

It is, to be sure, a good joke, and parts of it definitely owe a fair amount to Douglas Adams, most obviously the basic decision to get into the mind of a

cliché sci-fi villain for the sole purpose of showing how ridiculously banal he is. But equally, the focus is slightly different: the decision to frame Skagra's ridiculousness in such prosaic terms as budgeting his smiles and rating individual days is unmistakably Gareth Roberts; Adams would have gone with a very different sort of ridiculous pomposity, and indeed, largely does. Similarly, Roberts plays up the flirtation between Chris and Clare in a manner that will surprise absolutely nobody, since the couple who are obviously in love with each other but have each been too timid to tell the other is a Gareth Roberts staple.

The resulting book is the first version of *Shada* that we've talked about that manages to be both a relatively complete version of *Shada* and something that actually works in its own right. It moves along with charm and confidence, is reliably funny, has a brisk and serviceable prose style that evokes Terrance Dicks or, for that matter, Adams himself, and is, on the whole, quite good, which explains why the BBC proceeded to commission a novelization of *City of Death* from Roberts as soon as this came out. If one wants to simply experience *Shada* as a story, as opposed to forensically reconstructed non-existent television from the dawn of the 1980s, it is unmistakably the version to go for.

But there is one last wrinkle worth examining. Roberts's excellent homage of a Douglas Adams novel makes a persuasive case that this is the ideal form for *Shada* to take if it can't be a television story (which, after all, it can't). The only thing is, though, that if this is what you want, you can always read an actual Douglas Adams-penned adaptation of *Shada,* in the form of *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*.

Actually, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* is not quite an adaptation of *Shada*. For one thing, there's also quite a bit of *City of Death* in it. For another, there's loads of other things. The book experiments freely with multiple points of view, jumping around across what seems initially like an impossibly broad array of characters only to, as the story continues, finally reveal how all of these diverse strands fit together, and in particular fit together around a title character who makes his first appearance a rather shockingly long way into the book.

Nevertheless, large amounts of *Shada* do make it into the book, including the "one lump or two" gag. Professor Chronotis is there intact, although everyone calls him Reg (his name is explicitly Chronotis though), as is Chris, although now he's called Richard and has graduated from Cambridge to become a computer programmer, which makes the degree to which Chris was always shamelessly an authorial self-insert for Douglas Adams even funnier, really. But this change highlights something important, which is how much of *Shada* really does extend out of personal and idiosyncratic concerns for Douglas Adams. It's not just the Cambridge setting, the importance of which we've already talked about, but rather the sorts of people Douglas Adams is inclined to write about. It's a cheap shot to say the sorts of people Adams is inclined to write about are "people like him," but it is true that smart, bookish, science-minded people with a vague sense that they're living in a completely ridiculous world are his bread and butter in a way that ancient Time Lord prisons and galactic conquest simply

aren't.

And in many ways, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* benefits from this. You can tell that Adams's heart is in it in a way that it simply wasn't in any of his Doctor Who scripts. And that results in what is a better book than any of the others, including Gareth Roberts's, marvelous as that is. Because the truth is that when Douglas Adams is on form and really gets on a tear, nobody can touch him. He's simply and unapologetically one of the best there is. His sense of how to structure a joke, even over the course of paragraphs, is immaculate. His ability to wander through a diverse set of topics and themes and to tease clever insights out of them is blinding. Save for the inconvenient fact of what century P.G. Wodehouse wrote in, he's the P.G. Wodehouse of the twentieth century. And there is something about him working on what is a passion project that transcends anything he can do with Doctor Who (or indeed, by 1987, when *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* came out, anything he could do with *Hitchhiker's*).

There is one final note to make about *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, if only to highlight, as the book would have it, the interconnectedness of all things. In the wake of the novel's 1987 publication, Adams received fan mail from Richard Dawkins, who was particularly taken with the book. This led to a friendship between the two, and Dawkins was invited to Douglas Adams's fortieth birthday party in March of 1992, where he met Lalla Ward, who had also maintained a friendship with Adams following Doctor Who. The two hit it off spectacularly. Four months after the birthday party, *Shada* was finally released on VHS. Two months after that, Ward and Dawkins were married.

Time Can Be Rewritten: *The Well-Mannered War*

We have said that the Graham Williams era may well have been a joke far too clever for anyone to get, but it was not, we should stress, too clever for anyone to enjoy. Neither is it accurate to treat the Williams era as some failed experiment before its time. As we saw before, its ratings were solid even without ITV just collapsing. The AI figures show that people genuinely enjoyed it. And perhaps most importantly, Gareth Roberts exists.

Gareth Roberts has, if we are being honest, done more than anyone to rehabilitate the Williams era. I do not merely refer to his quite lovely "Tom the Second" essay discussed back in *The Horns of Nimon* (and before that in *The Armageddon Factor*), although it is a masterpiece of fan writing and its thesis, which can roughly be summarized as, "Shut up, it's really fun," ought to be, I think, the underpinning of many more arguments both scholarly and popular. But his real contribution to Williams-era rehabilitation are his three novels for the Missing Adventures range, all of them set within Season Seventeen.

There are two ways of looking at these novels. On the one hand, Gareth Roberts had already put out *The Highest Science* and *Tragedy Day* when the Missing Adventures line started and had firmly nailed down his role as "the funny one." Given that the New Adventures as a whole were pretty strikingly far from the "funny" brief, when the Missing Adventures started up, Gareth Roberts (who clearly was a great writer in the wrong era with the New Adventures) was a seemingly obvious choice to write for them. And this era was a similarly obvious choice for him to write in. In this regard his first Missing Adventure, *The Romance of Crime*, was almost inevitable – the sort of thing that just followed instinctively from the premise that the Missing Adventures existed.

The other perspective, and the one I prefer just because it involves casting Roberts as a sort of Robert Holmes villain cackling away in a cellar and shrieking about how he'll show them all and how SOON they will RECOGNIZE the POWER of GRAHAM! WILL! IAMS!, is, well, about what I just described. These novels are unabashedly and gloriously Gareth Roberts with a chip on his shoulder hell-bent on showing the world that they're wrong about his favorite era of Doctor Who. In this regard *The Romance of Crime*, which was written with such a sense of traditionalism as to adhere to what could plausibly have been made in 1979, is the most obvious. It is unabashedly an attempt to show not what the Williams era could have been but rather to show what it was, in point of fact, when written competently.

It was also a massive success, leading to Roberts doing two more, including this one, *The Well-Mannered War*, which doubled as the final book in the Missing Adventures line. And so, in a deft bit of continuity positioning, Roberts jumps

forward from the gap between *Creature from the Pit* and *Nightmare of Eden,* in which his first two books were set, and instead positions this one in the gap between the Williams era and the Nathan-Turner era. It's a new capstone for the Williams era, in other words, and a commentary on the transition from one era of the show to another.

But that commentary is the last few pages of the book, so let's leave it for a bit. Let's first do the traditional "clearing up popular misconceptions" moment where we discuss the received wisdom about this book. A lot of people seem to think there's a shift in tone halfway through. This claim is… puzzling. It is true that the comedic set piece of the first half – a pointless war that is a war in name only, in which the two sides get along perfectly well, and in which there's even a tea trolley serving the trenches – goes out the window and a war starts in earnest. But this is not so much a darkening of the book as it is an obvious moment of ratcheting up the tension. Of course if you have a wholly defused friendly war in the first act you need to have it turn into a proper war eventually. That's just how tension goes. But anyone saying that the second half of the book isn't funny must have stopped reading it midway through.

For one thing, the second half introduces the funniest character in the entire book: Fritchoff the lone Marxist revolutionary. (In fact he's just the lone member of the rebel militants. There are also three other militant rebels, but they're apparently inherently counter-revolutionary and have all been murdered by evil flies.) Fritchoff is a marvelous character. He is, of course, mocked ruthlessly by the entire book. But that's fine. This is meant to be the Williams era. Everyone is mocked ruthlessly by the entire production. Heck, the final shot of the Williams era is Romana making faces at the Doctor for being annoying. (Actually, the only character to evade mockery is Romana, who under Lalla Ward is seemingly above all reproach. Which is fair, let's face it.)

What's key about the mockery of Fritchoff is that he's at once parodic and detailed. For one thing, he's written by someone who visibly knows his Marxism at least decently well. Roberts nails every single one of the myriad of intellectual and linguistic sins committed by incompetent Marxists. It would be far too easy to give Fritchoff some Marxobabble dialogue that just blithely signifies "stupid Marxist," but instead Fritchoff gets to say things that make sense but are stupid and irrelevant to the matters at hand, such as "not getting killed by evil flies." This goes a tremendous way towards making the parody less mean-spirited. If you're actually familiar with Marxist literature Fritchoff is even funnier than he is if you're not. He's a parody that's best appreciated by the very people he's parodying.

Second of all, Roberts is careful to make the jokes at the expense of Fritchoff as a character, not at the expense of what he believes. The Doctor clearly has little patience or interest in Fritchoff's politics, but all the same expresses respect for his dedication and buys a copy of his newspaper (though he clearly isn't fond of it). Fritchoff isn't depicted as bad because he's a weirdo Marxist living in a hole, but because he's opportunistic, blinkered, and

hypocritical, clearly rationalizing what he wants to do with Marxist rhetoric instead of using Marxism as a set of principles. In other words, it's not that Marxism or Marxists are bad or silly, but that people like Fritchoff are. None of this is to say that Roberts appears fond of Marxism – he doesn't, and probably isn't. But there's a sense of love underlying his mockery. There is no malice or anger behind the jokes, here or anywhere else, and there's a tangible ethos that as long as you're also willing to laugh at your own side you're free to join in on the joke.

This sense of genuine love permeates the book. Roberts clearly grew up on Douglas Adams and his ilk, and has a delicious knack for the comic turn of phrase. But more to the point, the book revels in such phrases. Dialogue like, "We are prepared to enter into full negotiations on Barclow, without preconditions. As soon as they accept our terms," is a highlight. So too is the phrase "many a cheese-and-wine evening in the trenches," not to mention the moment in which the Doctor pulls a cup of tea from his pockets. These little gems are sprinkled throughout the book and rarely done with any flamboyance or showboating. There's a sense of understatement to it all. Even the most high concept aspects of the book – most obviously the idea of K-9 running for political office – aren't wallowed in.

It's tempting to treat this as a correction to the Williams era – an attempt to rein in the overacting and showboating that plagued several of its stories. But that would be unfair. It's not as though Roberts doesn't take opportunities for that kind of broad hammy comedy as well, most obviously in the character of Menlo Stokes, a fantastically irritating artist. But this is tempered with a willingness to go for humor without also going for wringing every laugh out of the audience. If anything, the book seems to enjoy knowing that the audience is unlikely to spot every joke on the first pass. The jokes are there because they're worth making, not just for the reaction. This is writerly humor, not a performer's humor.

Certainly this is true of the Williams era as well. Although written before the age of the VCR and permanent copies of thing, the Williams era was made at a point when the attitude towards archiving television was rapidly changing. It was during the Williams era that the BBC changed from treating its old recordings as irritating clutter and more like a national treasure to be preserved. And there's notably a tendency for the writers to do scripts with subtleties and nuances that simply wouldn't have made sense in the earlier single-use model of television. This, in a real sense, explains the sudden focus on characterization and motivation in the Williams era. The writers were making the earliest steps towards writing for an audience that would revisit the stories.

But for Doctor Who there's an even more obvious reason why writers might do this, which is that by this point it was clear that anything they wrote would be novelized. Even though key highlights of the Williams era weren't novelized, this wasn't due to Douglas Adams not wanting them novelized; on the contrary, he wanted to novelize them himself, it's just that he wanted more

money than Target would give him. Indeed, it speaks volumes that nearly a decade later, long after he had any rational reason to be revisiting his jobbing TV writer days, Douglas Adams eventually did basically novelize *City of Death* and *Shada* as *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*.

But this also marks out a curious influence Terrance Dicks had on the program. If we credit the writers in this era, having reason to believe that their stories would be revisited, for developing a more nuanced and character-based style of storytelling and a love of smaller and more understated jokes, then we are led to conclude that in a real sense the intended audience for large swaths of Doctor Who in this era was, in fact, Terrance Dicks himself. He was, after all, the one doing the novelizations. If you wanted a good line to be preserved he was the one who had to like it enough to keep it in the book. In practice, of course, video technology has swallowed that up, which means that what is and isn't remembered comes from rewatching, but it's worth pointing out that in the first era where posterity was seemingly thought of at all, it was Terrance Dicks who was the near-sole arbiter of that.

When Miles and Wood talk about the Williams era as being a "literary" era of Doctor Who, this is a lot of what they mean. The move towards more literate science fiction was in many ways a move towards the science fiction found in books, as that love of language was the essential difference between books and television. And books were reviewed. And so in this sense, even though the verbal perspicacity Roberts demonstrates and his delight in slipping in little asides is fundamentally a linguistic pleasure as opposed to a televisual one, it's one the era still shared.

Ah, yes. The era. Because in the end, that is what Roberts's book is about. There's a clear change in the way that Doctor Who is being thought about in the first place. The parceling of Doctor Who into eras is one that has slowly but inexorably increased from its debut. And I do not use "inexorable" here in a merely casual sense. Having written up seventeen seasons of the show in the last year, I can vouch for the fact that there really is an unavoidable gravity of this sense of "era" – the division of the show, in essence, into discrete segments that form mini-shows. To some extent this is just common sense. When you're dealing with a show of normal length the notion of eras just isn't helpful. When you're dealing with a show that's been around for over fifty years, on the other hand, eras are fundamentally helpful. They break the show into segments that are much closer to the sorts of things that the vocabulary of television criticism is already meant for.

On top of that, they make for lovely book dividers, whether you use the traditional and most superficially obvious structure of breaking a series up by Doctor (as I've mostly favored) or some other approach. One of the things I most respect *About Time* for is its decision to break its volumes up on season lines that approximate the shifts in who's producing the show. It's still not perfect – a proper treatment by producer would mean, for instance, that the Letts era is offset from the Pertwee era by one story. But nobody in their right

mind would run a book from *The Silurians* to *Robot* instead of from *Spearhead from Space* to *Planet of the Spiders*. For the most part, though, if you want to look at creative shifts, producers are the best yardstick to use.

But even still there's an odd way in which the logic of "the era" asserts itself more and more strongly as the show goes on. Part of that may simply be down to some idiosyncrasies of the 1960s. The fact that the John Wiles era happens within Season Three and lasts only four stories is a bit of a problem, as is the fact that the Lloyd-Bryant-Sherwin years bleed heavily into each other. But there's a more obvious culprit here, and that's fandom. By the late 1970s Doctor Who fandom was undeniably a thing, and with it came a consensus vocabulary and a lot of chatter that used it. As a result, there's a much larger body of received critical wisdom about the changes between *The Horns of Nimon* and *The Leisure Hive* than there is about the changes between *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* and *The Horror of Fang Rock*.

We'll deal with the question of exactly how dramatic the gap actually is between those two stories over the next two essays. But suffice it to say that we are now firmly in a period in which there are piles of critical dogma and fan politics that stand behind every single judgment that can be made. If *Planet of the Spiders* marked the point where my own personal history with Doctor Who became an ever-present part of the series (with an odd gap for the Williams era in which the era is, for me, mostly defined by how much I wanted to see it and couldn't), here is where the fan debates become omnipresent. Actually, to some extent that was the Williams era, hence the frequent nipping off to check the Anniversary poll and all.

But what happens next is John Nathan-Turner. The first seventeen years of Doctor Who have eight different producers. The next ten have one. John Nathan-Turner, who takes over with the next story, oversees four different Doctors, three regenerations, and the cancellation of the series. And thus, fittingly and ironically, it is over him that one of the biggest critical question marks in the series hangs.

Nathan-Turner himself is a deeply problematic figure, and given the extent to which he thrust himself forward as one of the stars of the show it is impossible to spare him from careful judgment. There's too much debate over him to ignore. Unsurprisingly, given that he was a human being and all, the end result of that analysis is going to be muddier. He made some incompetently stupid creative decisions in his tenure and some deeply questionable personal ones. He also got the show cancelled. Then again, he made some brilliant creative decisions and probably saved it from being cancelled in 1981, a point we'll look at over the remainder of this book.

But in any case, this is The Big One when it comes to era shifts. Despite the fact that only the producer and script editor change between *The Horns of Nimon* and *The Leisure Hive*, this shift is, for all critical purposes, as tectonic as the shift from *The War Games* to *Spearhead from Space* (which, ironically, had a considerably smaller actual creative shift) or from *The End of Time* to *The Eleventh*

Hour. The only shift that's definitively larger is the shift from cancelled to 2005.

Except that there's one other shift that's just as big as those, and it's one that is hardly ever mentioned. And that's the shift from the Virgin Books era to the BBC Books era. This is a shift I've alluded to before, and it's massive in two ways. The first is a very broad way. There were three sustained continuations of Doctor Who between 1989 and 2005: The Virgin New Adventures, the BBC Books Eighth Doctor Adventures, and the Big Finish Audios. Two of these proved to be such major influences on the new series they might as well be considered de facto canon. The other was BBC Books. It is genuinely striking just how influential both Big Finish and Virgin were on the development of the series. Even more striking is how completely irrelevant the BBC Books line has proven to be.

This is not a judgment on its quality – a thumbing through of my comments on the BBC Books novels will show that I've found much to love there. Rather, it's a simple judgment of influence. BBC Books writers were not tapped to write for the new series, ideas from the BBC books line were (with one major exception) not really imported into the new series, and the aesthetic of the new series has very, very little to do with what came out of BBC Books.

But this gets at a second issue, which is that a lot of the mainstay writers of the Virgin line did not follow to the BBC Books line. Among those who didn't was Gareth Roberts, who wrote seven books for Virgin, two audio plays for Big Finish, and not a word for BBC Books. And he's far from the only one to drop out, so to speak. There's a clear split that happens between the lines, and the shift is not without pot shots on both sides about the other line.

And there's no way to read the ending of *The Well-Mannered War* as anything but a comment on both the Virgin/BBC era split and the Williams/Nathan-Turner era split. In the end it turns out that the entire plot of the novel has been a trap laid by the Black Guardian for the Doctor, and that the Doctor has thoroughly fallen for it. Faced with a choice between causing the deaths of billions or abandoning travel and staying in the TARDIS forever, the Doctor and Romana proceed to cheat the Black Guardian and activate the emergency unit last used at the end of The Dominators, throwing themselves out of the universe. He remarks to Romana that last time this happened they ended up in the Land of Fiction.

"Then we'd just be characters, not real people," Romana frets. But there is no other option, and so the Doctor and Romana press the button and simply depart the universe entirely.

It's hilariously and delightfully petulant. The Doctor would seemingly rather give up on his "reality" than be sucked into the John Nathan-Turner era. Taken as an ending to the Virgin line it's a bit nicer, but there's still a tangible anger to it – a declaration that whatever happens next doesn't get to impact or erase what Roberts and his friends have built. (And they really did build something extraordinary.) But first and foremost, it is a commentary on the Williams era, and an illustration of one final point in its defense – a rejoinder to

those who object to its supposed lack of seriousness. It is a reminder that comedy, even good-natured comedy, can readily be weaponized.

To some extent this is the thrust of the whole book. It is a book about war in which quite a lot of people die. The subject matter portrayed in the book is funny, but, notably, it's funny only because it's not real. But this is an important function of fiction. Absurdist humor is only funny in fiction. In reality it's just totalitarianism. There's nothing actually funny about Margaret Thatcher because she was unfortunately and frustratingly real. But in fiction, where the dead don't count, it is possible to make a point that is difficult to make in reality. Pointing out that the emperor has no clothes is much easier when it doesn't actually involve seeing Margaret Thatcher naked.

So Roberts ends on a cutting joke, but one with some real truth underlying it. His defense of the Williams era, after all, has always been that it's very fun. And here we see that elevated to a moral point. The possibility of humor is, in a real sense, a powerful stopgap against a number of problems. Things can't ever be too bad as long as it's possible to laugh about them. Doctor Who can't ever be too bad as long as it's still funny.

And this is, in the end, the key point of the Williams era. Yes, it was funny and silly. But it was about being funny and silly. The distinction may be subtle, but it's very much real. It's not just a series of jokes, but a series of jokes about how bad people without a sense of humor are. There's a real moral purpose to it, and it's one that it's very hard to object to.

It's just a pity that the entirety of its creative staff wasn't as good as Gareth Roberts.

More Frocks, Less Guns: An Interview with Gareth Roberts

Gareth Roberts, author of three Virgin Missing Adventures set in the Graham Williams era, two of which are being adapted to audio by Big Finish, the landmark defense of the era "Tom the Second," and the novelizations of both *Shada* and *City of Death*, kindly agreed to an interview about the Graham Williams era, what he loves about it, and how he went about writing for it years after the fact.

Philip Sandifer: I'm sorry that this is a horribly hyper-specific wonky question, but I was rereading your essay, "Tom the Second," that you wrote—

Gareth Roberts: Yeah! Which was 21 years ago…

PS: That was actually what I was going to ask, because when it was reprinted in *Licence Denied*, it said it was in DWB #122, and I checked that to get the date, and it wasn't there, so I wanted to check the year.

GR: Yes, it was November '93. The 30th Anniversary special.

PS: Ah, OK. So Paul Cornell just screwed up, and we can roundly humiliate him in print for making such a massive blunder. So, OK, can you talk about why you wrote that essay?

GR: I think it's one of those things where I sort of accidentally hit on something when I was writing it. It's quite undisciplined. It is all over the place.

PS: As good fan writing is.

GR: I remember sitting in my bedroom in Winchester writing on an Amstrad, twenty-one years ago, and just thinking, "Ooh, ooh, this is taking off, I've got something here, this is going to have really good stuff in it." I think about time I'd sort of—because I'd been a fan, but I'd never been in fandom, apart from a very small, a very short time when I was eleven when I went to a convention. What I found was, that when I wrote *The Highest Science* I sort of got into fandom, and just by accident I knew somebody that knew Paul Cornell, so I ended up going to the tavern and things like that. And sort of kind of all exploded out of me if you know what I mean.

PS: Were you the only Williams era fan at the tavern?

GR: Not really. But I remember when I was first sort of saying this stuff to people, I remember Cornell going, "Oh my god, you're the future. Oh my god. You've gone passed up me. You're younger than me. Oh, you're going to be in London. Ahhgh." 'Cause they were all sort of doing dark re-imaginings in that very early nineties way. I loved dark re-imaginings, I really liked them, but I always like to do what other people aren't doing. Because otherwise you run a risk of getting absorbed, if you know what I mean.

PS: I remember when *The Highest Science* came out, you really got a reputation —this was when I was eleven—but I remember it immediately had a reputation, that you were the one who writes funny books in contrast to the sort of more adult tone of the rest. How much of that was conscious rabble-rousing on your part?

GR: Not really. Cause I didn't actually—when I was writing, I really wasn't in fandom. I read fanzines and things. But it wasn't a point of rabble-rousing. When I was eleven and went to that convention, I bought the fanzines around that time—and that was in the Graham Williams era between seasons Sixteen and Seventeen—and that was very anti-Graham Williams, and I just didn't understand what they were going on about, I really hadn't got a clue. So I guess some of that carried with me. And also I think that, just a natural thing, that that was how I was sort of into Doctor Who. Also though, and this is a big caveat, if the original series had not rested at Season Twenty-Six, but had rested at Twenty-Five, I think things would have been very different. Because that season, and Twenty-Four for what it's worth, I think are very much lighter, and funnier. You look at *Greatest Show in the Galaxy*, *Happiness Patrol*, *Remembrance*, they've got a kind of Graham Williamsy thing to them in a way.

PS: I'm on record as one of the defenders of poor *Paradise Towers*, so.

GR: Yeah, yeah! So, the thing I found a bit hard to swallow was the kind of dark re-imagining based on that last year. So I was still thinking of the Sylvester McCoy era on TV when I was writing *Highest Science* but I wasn't thinking of those last few particular ones.

PS: Right. Less of the manipulative *Curse of Fenric*, more of the juggling clown.

GR: Yeah! I was thought the problem with the Doctor planning was that he wasn't—to me, as a character, he didn't seem like a planner.

PS: Right, you put a piece about that in *Highest Science*—

GR: To be fair to Andrew Cartmel and that lot, they wrote that he was a planner that got things wrong. Even in *Warhead*, there's a bit at the end where he goes, "I brought these two things together, and I completely fucked it up." And so even then there was that feeling that he was a sort of Buster Keaton character that suddenly had godlike powers.

PS: And *Highest Science* did come right after *Transit*, which probably made its comedy aspects—

GR: That was quite a shock to the system.

PS: Your complete lack of any discussion of the taste of semen in *The Highest Science* really set a different tone.

GR: Yes, there was that.

PS: Though this does get to—I talk about it in some essays—as I recall you're one of the people credited with inventing the term—can you explain the whole "gun versus frock" thing?

GR: It was just something I wrote in an email—no, it wouldn't have been an email, it would have been a letter—to Kate Orman, and I just said at the end, I said, "More frocks, less guns." I just meant it in general. I didn't mean it about Doctor Who. I was just writing her a letter to congratulate her on *The Left-Handed Hummingbird*, actually, that was such a fantastic book. But I remember still being in that same room, so it must have been '93/'94, and I'd just signed off this letter and said "More frocks, less guns." And it wasn't until ten, fifteen years later that somebody said something to me about it, and I went, "Oh my god, that comment's from me!"

PS: So was it something you weren't aware of when it was the big debate in fandom?

GR: No! No, I wasn't aware of it at all. I didn't know that. Was that *rec.arts.drwho* time?

PS: Around then, yeah.

GR: I wasn't a part of that. I remember Paul Cornell printing some off for me once, after a review of *Tragedy Day*, and thinking, "This is strange. All these people are talking about me on this weird computer thing." Then obviously a couple of years later we had the Internet. As we know it today.

PS: Yes. Such a strange and wonderful thing. So, going back to the Williams era, is it still like your favorite era of Doctor Who, or has it been supplanted in the last twenty years?

GR: I don't know, because I love the Hartnell era so much. And, I dunno, it's difficult because Troughton, Davison, and Matt Smith are sort of my favorite Doctors. I love particularly the early Hartnell, the first couple of years, actually I like it all, I'm a massive Season Three and Four fan. And I also really like Russell's Doctor Who. In a way, I remember—when I got a script of Russell's Doctor Who, I remember turning to someone and saying, "It's the Graham Williams era done properly." Which I think is kind of—I'm not blind to the faults of the Williams era, I know it looks a bit cheap, I know it sometimes builds up to something and then looks terrible, but I mean—and that happens more than a lot of the time in Doctor Who—but at the same time, it has that kind of cheek, and spirit, and warmth.

PS: There's a sense that unlike the two previous eras where you had not just stability with the producers but stability with the script editor—Letts had Dicks the whole time, Hinchcliffe had Holmes the whole time—Williams goes through a script editor every year or so, so there's a real uneven and endless reinventing of the wheel.

GR: You can really tell that.

PS: Yeah, so how would you describe each of the seasons of the Williams era?

GR: I think Fifteen is very uneven. You can tell there's an economic crisis that year. You can tell that by the end that they'd really run out of money and what with the inflation—by the end of the season they're making an episode for the price of a third of what they had at the beginning.

PS: You can tell there's an economic crisis—it was called *Underworld*.

GR: Yes! It's very shaky, that season. Tom doesn't really—to me, when people say Tom is naughty, or badly behaved, that's the season I think of. I think he really has a feeling of not wanting to be there, sometimes looking a bit drunk. Whereas I think with Mary Tamm, that middle year, I think Anthony Read is what you'd call a consummate professional. So everything's very, very neat and tidy. There's hardly any plot holes. They go to lengths to explain things you don't really need to explain. Well, apart from *The Armageddon Factor*. Most Doctor Who, as with Season Fifteen, is very uneven, it goes up and down, but the thing about Season Sixteen is that it feels like a piece, it feels like it's cozy, all together, as

one.

PS: *Power of Kroll*?

GR: It's a lovely sci-fi setting. It's a beautiful image, the towers and the swamps and everything, but the direction of that is terrible. I think the script is pretty good.

PS: I always thought the problem with *The Power of Kroll* is that it's really dumb to go to Robert Holmes and say, "Don't do a funny one."

GR: Yeah. Which is what they did, I gather.

PS: You can sort of see Holmes storming off of the series as you go through the four episodes.

GR: Yeah, but it has got some of the best lines ever, like, "All baloney," and, "It's atrociously writ," and all those sorts of things. Rohm-Dutt should be very funny but isn't. But I think that's casting as well, that's very odd casting. Glyn Owen was in every program in Britain, going, "'Ello, ah ah," and that's everything Rohm-Dutt. He was in Howard's Way if you've heard of that.

PS: I have.

GR: But then I think that Douglas, totally contrary to what Terrance Dicks said in *DWM* a couple of weeks ago, I think Douglas is the best script editor that he ever had, and actually delivers really, really tight scripts, and really inventive clever things, and really thinks laterally, and does it in a very serious way.

PS: I think the only story in Seventeen that's really let down by the script is *Destiny to the Daleks*, and what are you going to do with that?

GR: Yes, but *Shada*, I think, that's a bit dodgy.

PS: Really?

GR: Scriptwise I think, yeah. Plot holes all throughout, as I know only too well. But I think something like *Nightmare of Eden*, I remember once when I spoke to J Jeremy Bentham, a Doctor Who fan of the old time, he said he read the script of *Nightmare of Eden* and thought, "This is going to be the best Doctor Who story ever made." And I can understand why he feels that. It's funny, it's got a really weird twist with the drugs being the monsters, it's got the two ships crashing into each other, which is an amazing idea. It's sort of got really brilliant effects, and things—the Mandrels look terrible, and the direction is a bit wonky

and all over the place.

PS: For all that people accuse Douglas Adams of being undisciplined, he's the first person to get a disciplined script out of Bob Baker since Season Ten.

GR: Absolutely. And also, I think Douglas has a very interesting interview that I found—which was on a Hitchhiker's site in some obscure corner of the Internet, where he's in his Doctor Who office, just about to leave, and has kind of a rant about the BBC and says, "I tried to make it different, but it's just going to look exactly the same this year. 'Cause that's what you're up against." I found that very interesting. He was going to bring in all these people like Sarah Dunant and John Lloyd and everyone, and it didn't work. I think what he really needed, and what he says in the unfolding text that he needed and didn't get was (garbled) discipline on the studio floor. I think Tom was basically told, "You are more important than the producer" at that point, which is like putting a gun to a production. That's inconceivable in the TV world nowadays.

PS: That's the first thing John-Nathan Turner got sorted out.

GR: Yes. He told him to shape up. Oh, sorry, Clayton's just had a thought.

Clayton Hickman: It just occurred to me that both Graham and Douglas are the first people to work on Doctor Who who came to Doctor Who with big ideas for Doctor Who. Douglas was a fan, and Graham, even though he didn't get to do it his first season, came in with this big document written about the Key to Time, what he wanted to do with the show. They were both coming at it with a sort of, "We've got these ideas!"

GR: Yeah. And also, a thing to remember when particularly we get fans nowadays going, "Oh, we want people who don't know anything about the show to run it." But Douglas was the first really—I think Robert Holmes was probably a Doctor Who fan—but Douglas was certainly a mega-Doctor Who fan. *The Daleks' Masterplan*—

PS: Shamelessly ripped off for *Hitchhiker's*.

GR: It's got the mice, it's got cricket, you know, yeah.

PS: What else from the period—I know you're a massive British/random pop-culture-from-the-Sixties-and-Seventies buff, what else should one watch along with the Williams era? What else from that period are its cultural cousins?

GR: I think *I, Claudius*, I think that may look a little more Hinchcliffey, but it has got the humor and feels very much of its era. *Blake's 7*, obviously. I think

stuff like Larry Grace's *Generation Game*, which was right next to Doctor Who at the time, you've got to remember, it was right next to this very camp man running this game show and making gay jokes all the way through it. It felt, at the time—because everything was in house then, when the BBC all lived in the same building, which they did, basically—that they might pop into each others' shows. They had the same kind of fonts and credits, and it all felt very, very intermingled. You know there's Christmas tapes, video tape, they're very much from Graham Williams' era. There was a feeling that the country was going down the tubes at the time, but I was too small to understand that. I just thought that was how things were. I couldn't understand. We always had an economic crisis.

PS: You always had a Thatcher.

GR: Yes, yes. Well, that was before her, though, of course. It was during her ascent, yes.

PS: The election was right before Season Seventeen.

GR: Generally there was a kind of feeling, I think looking back now, of greyness. Punk as well, I think that also has a sort of bearing here. There's a kind of feeling of, "We don't need to be prog." There's something in the air about, "We can put a few stickers on our record and make it at home." Which you could extrapolate from that to, like, The Megara. There's a kind of—June Hudson, for example, she is working in a kind of crazy imaginative way on a very low budget. That's the kind of thing I think of of that time as well.

PS: Going to your Graham Williams era contributions, going through your three Missing Adventures, *The Romance of Crime* was one of the first in the line. What were you hoping to do with that? Especially because when the Missing Adventures were announced—again, this is my memory of fandom when I was twelve, thirteen years old—but it felt like as soon as the Missing Adventures were announced, everyone's first reaction was, "Oh, so Gareth Roberts will write a Graham Williams era novel."

GR: Yeah, it probably was. At the time when it was first being noted, I got the feeling that—you know Moffat's famous story after the Big Finish meeting? "If you're not doing the Paul McGann, then I'm not interested." I remember when they were first suggested, I always thought Doctor Who should keep going forward, generally, so I was thinking, "Isn't this a backwards step? I'm not sure about this." But it was obvious by then that the series wasn't coming back, so far as we could tell, so in the end I just thought, "Sod it, go for it." But I do think if I had been Peter Darvill-Evans at the beginning of the New Adventures, I would have got rid of Ace and brought in a new companion much quicker and powered

it along quicker. More going forward, to the new thing. Just much more like a television attitude to take, actually. Probably wrong. It's like when people said to me, recently, "Why isn't Ian Chesterton in *The Caretaker*?" it's like, well, we've just had the 50th year. We had loads of references. I actually prefer to do something that has a little looking back as possible. But yes, *Romance of Crime*, I think the idea was, "How did I do it as an idea for the comic strip?" And I just changed into a book.

PS: I vaguely recall, you made an effort to write that one that plays entirely fair, to do something that was also plausibly doable on a Williams era budget.

GR: With the New Adventures it didn't seem to matter so much, but I found it really difficult to put the characters in somewhere I couldn't imagine them being able to film. Somebody once said, "All you books read as if they could be in a power station in 1978." That was all fine. But I actually found that, as with a lot of restrictions, it actually is quite intriguing. It actually opens up new avenues and you can do things differently. So. With *The English Way of Death*, particularly, that would be undoable, even now that would be a stretch on television.

PS: I confess that's the only one of the three that I haven't read, so how does it differ from the average tale?

GR: It's more expensive, as it were. There's a lot more walking around London and things like that. It's a cross-genre clash as I'd read a lot of E. F. Benson, *Mapp and Lucia*, all that stuff, which is kind of a comedy of manners in '20s/'30s London and suburbs, and the country. So I thought it would be really funny to put the Doctor and Romana and K9 into that setting. Clash the two things together. So that was that one. And then with *The Well-Mannered War* we knew it was going to be the last one, so I decided to surprise everyone at the end by doing something I would normally never do.

PS: With this turn to the quite grisly.

GR: Yeah, and also the Black Guardian coming up at the end. I didn't want to just to end it and them to go off and have new adventures because you see, we were a bit pissed off at the BBC's attitude at the time. They basically commissioned Gary Russell to write their novel of the movie, completely broke all their agreements with Virgin; they were incredibly cavalier. It was almost like they really didn't care.

PS: And then they put someone who had no idea what they were doing in charge of the Eight Doctor Adventures at first.

GR: Indeed. Yes.

PS: I should really interview you again for the book that covers the Virgin era. Talking about the *Well-Mannered War*, there are some really grisly passages in this. And you did just write the most gruesome death in Doctor Who history with that severed hand in *The Caretaker*—can you talk about horror in Doctor Who? Especially with all these things about how the Williams era wasn't scary like the Hinchcliffe era.

GR: I think there's an element of truth in that. And that's why I've always been quite keen when I'm in tone meetings and things like that, to say that things should be a bit scarier in mine than they are usually. Although I've said that to several directors and they never quite get it, until *The Caretaker*. For example, the Carrionites as I saw them were quite funny on screen, they wore funny masks. But I saw them as being utterly, utterly horrible. So I think there's always a danger that you have to guard against, and Russell and Steven are both very good at this, that people will get a funny script and think, "Ooh, it's funny, I'll do my funny acting!"

PS: You're word for word doing Douglas Adams now.

GR: Oh, right, right, yes! But really, things are always funnier when they're played straight. It's like with the original ending of *Closing Time*, with the conversion thing, I wanted there to be knives, and blood drawn, and god knows what coming at James Corden. I wasn't allowed that.

PS: Oh, that's so sad! That would've been great.

GR: Yeah, and also the Cybermen in that were originally—I wanted them to be so awful, full of spare parts and looking awful, and terrible, but what they said to me was, "We can either do that, and it looks pony, or we can do it so it works, but it can't be transmitted." So we had to go down the middle way.

PS: But somehow you got away with your severed hand?

GR: Yeah! But what I was thinking, those horror bits should be as horrific as you can get them, and the funny bits should be as funny as you can get them, and the two things should clash. Not in a horrible Eric Saward way, but this is the other thing people forget about the Hinchcliffe era, is how funny it is. You know, *The Seeds of Doom* is hysterical. It's got the funniest bit in all of Doctor Who, when Harrison Chase says, "Bear up, Keeler," at one point. And *The Brain of Morbius* is a laugh riot from beginning to end, you do not go two lines without there being a really funny joke.

PS: My wife and I—I will still, on occasion, annoy my wife by going, "But

even a *sponge* has more life than I!"

GR: Exactly! People forget that. And I think they forget that because the horror effects are more horrific.

PS: So much of the power of that story comes from the fact that it has that horrifically realistic bullet hit right alongside "even a sponge has more life than I."

GR: And lots of that, the humor and the drama all fit the same tone, and I do think they pull back on that a bit too much Graham Williams' time. And in JNT's time, to be honest. I was like 7 or 8 when Hinchcliffe was coming out, and it didn't do me any harm. Looking back on it now, as an adult, when I watched them again on DVD, I thought, "Oh my god!" Because as an adult, your mind is so much more open to the potential and the empathy of things. So, the key to turning into a Krynoid to me as an adult is horrific; to me as a kid it was like, "That man's turning into a vegetable… Isn't that great!"

PS: The best children's literature traumatizes you for life.

GR: Yes! But then again, what it does—if it has a social role, it's to test out your fears. It's working out what to be afraid of and coping with growing up.

PS: I know they're not out for a few months, but can you talk a bit about the Big Finish adaptations of your work?

GR: I haven't been able to get to the recording studio yet, so it's as much of a surprise—but yes, I'm sort of intrigued as ever. I like to be surprised by things. For the Eighth Season, I've read *Kill the Moon* but I haven't read any of the others and I don't know what's going to happen. I try to keep myself in the dark as much as possible. The episodes *Turn Left* and *Midnight*, which I'd never read or knew anything about, they always have much more of an impact when you do that.

PS: One of my favorite small moments of Doctor Who commentary is Moffat at the end of the *Forest of the Dead* commentary where he cautions everybody because he wants to see the trailer because it's the only one he doesn't know anything about. It's adorable to see Moffat hushing people because there's new Doctor Who along.

GR: That's exactly how it feels. But at the end of *Kill the Moon* I will probably turn the trailer off, because I know nothing about what happens next week. That's my preferred way of watching.

PS: Not to be over-skeptical about it, but why do you think people are so excited about the Big Finish adaptations of these twelve-year-old novels?

GR: I remember back in the day, there'd be a New Adventures panel at a convention and everyone would walk out. Not us, the panel, the writers, I mean the audience. The audience would just go, "Oh, it's them," and go away. And over the years people grow up and things change and you become a classic thing —

PS: Right, the New Adventures are a classic and major influence—

GR: —but at the time it was like, "I do not read these, 1 out of 10."

PS: I wonder if the Eighth Doctor Adventures are ever going to recover.

GR: No, probably not. But yes, it's fascinating to see. Also, for people like yourself, who were a young age when those were coming out, that's kind of your Doctor Who.

PS: Which is weird, because I hardly ever finished them, they were actually slightly too adult for me. So I'd endlessly hit the point where it's 75 pages since the Doctor showed up and I'm bored now.

GR: I never did that. I couldn't bear that. My attitude was that you want to have one of the regular cast in every bit. I don't like splitting up the Doctor and the companion in general if I can. *Remembrance* is a good example of them together almost throughout the entire thing.

PS: And that's where the Doctor/Ace interplay really becomes the engine that drives the show.

GR: And also I think, nowadays in the modern ones there's not enough time to split them up for very long. But also it's also Tom and Lalla and you want them firing off each other.

PS: You wrote those books, you did "Tom the Second," at a period where fandom was still heavily defined by that sort of anti-Williams backlash that, let's be honest here, Ian Levine and John Nathan-Turner really stoked the flames of consciously.

GR: Very unprofessionally in John Nathan-Turner's case.

PS: He definitely throws the guy who got him the job under the bus, so he can have someone to have a revolution off of.

GR: Reading between the lines from some of the recent pronouncements from poor Mr Levine, who was terribly ill at the moment, and we should all be quite sad about that—his impression was that it wasn't until Barry Letts came on board that any of that was going to change. JNT was going, "And then we'll make Doctor Who off at some fantastic holiday camp planet with some reptile Mafiosos!" and then Berry Letts and Bidmead came in and pulled the blue boring-ers on him. That's when it happened. Which to me makes a lot more sense knowing what JNT would later do.

PS: Though I feel like the tension between Nathan-Turner's strong visual sense but light-hearted sensibility, and Bidmead, really does make something special in Season Eighteen.

GR: I think so. I think it's a bit like *Solaris*, Season Eighteen, it's a thing to be admired rather than enjoyed. One thing that nobody ever says about Season Eighteen, no one ever says it's an influence: *Sapphire & Steel*.

PS: I talk about this, like, one or two essays after where this interview will be in the book.

GR: The opening scene of *The Leisure Hive* is shot-for-shot an opening to a *Sapphire & Steel*. You know, if they ever did a *Sapphire & Steel* at this beach, it would begin with slow panning shots revealing Sapphire and Steel. Like the one at the railway station where it's just panning around the set until they appear. And these two lofty super-beings talking. That kind of television is fascinating and wonderful and could have something of a renaissance at some point. I absolutely loved Season Eighteen at the time, but I was a nerdy thirteen-year-old boy. And I think it lost some of the wider reach of the show.

PS: Thirteen-year-old boys are definitely the target audience.

GR: Yes. And luckily I was one.

PS: I got VHS tapes for that at around the same time, the same age. So do you think the Williams era's reputation has improved in the last twenty years?

GR: Oh yes. I think what's happened is that people have grown up a bit, and they can see things in a different light. Also it's—I remember somebody once saying, "Oh, well, trendy revisionists have tried to make out that this is all some sort of meta-fictional highfaluting thing." My attitude was really, "Actually, no, it's just good, it's just fun. It has characters in it that are warm and funny and we love them and it's a great adventure." When Gary Gillatt and Nick Pegg were doing a lot on *Doctor Who Magazine*, that was a kind of turning point as well,

because they were big fans. So before it was Gary Russell, who complained about "undergraduate humor," and that was the voice of fandom. And when the voice of fandom changed, it loosened up. It's sort of a bit like, the way fandom's taste is going now, it's got a bit straighter, a bit more boyish. But it takes time. I think we could do with a bit of camp. More frocks, less guns.

PS: That's really always good advice. In one of the last issues of *Doctor Who Magazine*, there's a Gatiss quote I saw that I wanted to relay to you, where he said that the default setting of the new series since it came back in 2005 has been *City of Death*, and now under Capaldi it's *Horror of Fang Rock*. Do you think the new series really is just all wall-to-wall Williams era like that? I saw that and was like, "What a triumph for the unheralded era!"

GR: In a strange way. I do remember when I was in meeting with Julie and Russell once, and we kept about talking stories we might make—this bit's like *Stones of Blood*, and that bit's like Androids of Tara, and that bit like—and then we came out and I said to Russell, "We always just talk about those, don't they?" And he said, "Well, yes, because they had a kind of—it was the kind of Doctor Who your mum could watch." I think that there's an element of that, even though Steven has—Steven doesn't have opinions anymore, because he can't, you know—but when he did have opinions our big debate was about the Graham Williams era, which he didn't like because it looked terrible. What Steven said when he first took over was something like he didn't want any silly monsters. What I think Steven does is take a very serious idea and play it quite funny, sometimes. Like *Let's Kill Hitler*, or, you know, take a very, very serious scary idea, and there were lots of gags in it. What I tend to do, or try to do sometimes, is to take a really mad idea and play it for real. One of my favorite, between you and me, my favorite piece of Doctor Who work that I've ever done is the book *Only Human*.

PS: You've said that in an interview before, so that's not a secret.

GR: That's the clearest example of what my Doctor Who would be like, if you know what I mean. So it's a mad idea, but it's told with—and it's got lots of jokes in it!—it's told with a gravity.

PS: I remembering reading an interview where you said you wrote that one in part kind of annoyed that you hadn't gotten asked for the new series.

GR: I think in your piece that you wrote about that you said that it was very sad that there was no equivalent thing now. And I think we're absolutely right. Now I'm just working on another show at the moment for ITV next year which is a kind of SF show, and the trouble they've had getting writers and the trouble they've had getting female writers—they've got one, hooray! They've done it! —

but British television doesn't have the kind of genre-savviness that American TV does. So there's Doctor Who, and virtually that's it.

PS: Every time someone tries to imitate Doctor Who there's that "Nope, nope, you don't understand what you're imitating" moment.

GR: It's a hard thing to get right.

PS: You did the *Shada* novelization, and you've got *City of Death* forthcoming still, yes?

GR: Yes, supposedly. One day, yes.

PS: On your end or theirs?

GR: On my part, yeah.

PS: So how did/are you approaching those two books? Particularly a novel after Douglas Adams who has such a distinctive prose style in his own right that you're inevitably going to be compared to him.

GR: I think the most successful of Adams' books are his novelizations, the first two, *Restaurant* and *Hitchhiker's*, and a lot of them are very dialogue-heavy, and he doesn't put much in apart from the good bits. And actually I think he's a stronger scriptwriter than he is than anything else. He's a strong dramatist in a way, even though he didn't think he was. Having had that big success with books, he was pushed into that. And I think they are absolutely superb, but I still think he was a better scriptwriter.

PS: And notably that's where he goes from the person who can pound out *City of Death* in a weekend to the person who takes twenty years to write a book.

GR: Yes, but if you've got the power to knock out deadlines you will not have deadlines.

PS: Absolutely. But I think also—I agree with you there's a way in which the book is just such a rougher format for him—

GR: What I did with *Shada* was just to kind of—because I knew there were problems with it, it was a much easier job than *City of Death*, because every time you add something to *City of Death* it's like, "You're painting on the Mona Lisa." Whereas Shada has enormous problems in it, and I knew he didn't like it, and nobody knows it that well, actually, so it gave me—so much of it is me in that book. And I've had people quote back to me, saying "Oh, wasn't Douglas

Adams brilliant when he wrote the bit about blah," and I go, "No, that was me." The thing is for me, prose is—well, Robert Holmes said it was like digging trenches; I think it's like pulling teeth. It really does—it's so hard, and so slow for me, I'm like Kate Bush with a book. Whereas as with TV I still find it hard, but it's a completely different skill set, and it allows you to delegate so much responsibility to other people.

PS: You've written for all four new series Doctors in one medium or another, so which one—

GR: All of them, apart from the War Doctor and David Tennant the Second, I think I've written for them all in some medium.

PS: You've written for both David Tennants.

GR: No, I mean David Tennant the human Doctor.

PS: Ah, not the second Tenth Doctor. So, which one do you feel is the most Tom Baker/Williams era, which one do you feel has that spirit and style most?

GR: I'd say Matt, in a way. The weird thing about Matt was that I was kind of writing that Doctor before he was cast.

PS: Right, and ended up defining him by accident.

GR: Yes, yes. I wrote kind of bits like that when I was writing for David and they always got cut. So to me there's something incredibly wonderful about the Doctor going, "I know exactly what I'm doing. Ahhh! Amy, help!" That was one of the first things I wrote in this script that was never made, I wrote this thing where in the pre-titles he was just going, "I know exactly what I'm doing." And in the end it ended up with him being dragged by a robot across the city with him going, "Amy, I didn't know what I was doing!" So that naughty schoolboy sort of Tom Baker Doctor in Matt was kind of what I found the most similar to, yeah.

PS: So is there anything else in the Williams era you're dying to talk about?

GR: I don't think so. I think I've got it all out. Your questions were very good.

Is There Such a Thing as the Nathan-Turner Era, and is it a Complete Disaster?

A commissioned essay for Glenn Harrison.

There is a sense in which this volume of *TARDIS Eruditorum* is actually two books in one. Given that I opted to split the behemoth that is the Tom Baker era into two volumes, and positioned that split at the change in producers from Philip Hinchcliffe to Graham Williams, it's impossible to ignore the fact that the entire remainder of this book consists of something that is as distinct from the Graham Williams era as the Graham Williams era is from the contents of Volume Four. It's just that there's only one season of it before there's another big change.

Except that big change isn't another change in producers, but a combined change of Doctor and script editor. Three years after that there's another change, but only in Doctor, and indeed, Volume Six of *TARDIS Eruditorum* is going to include both the Peter Davison and Colin Baker eras. Three years later, it will be another Doctor/script editor change, not a change in producer, which will mark a new era. It's really not until 1991 that you get anything that could be called a producer change, and even that is just Doctor Who jumping from being a television series to a book series, and thus having an editor instead of a producer. John Nathan-Turner, for his part, would remain in nominal charge of BBC-produced televisual Doctor Who well into the 1990s, which meant in practice that he supervised video releases and the 1993 Doctor Who/*EastEnders* comedy crossover *Dimensions in Time*. All of which means, in effect, that the remainder of this book, the entire next book, and a sizable chunk of the book after that are all going to be covering the producership of John Nathan-Turner.

This presents a sense of scale not unlike that presented by trying to pretend that there's some sort of coherent sense of "era" encompassing not only both *Robot*, which is in effect a Pertwee story written for a new Doctor that nobody really knew anything about yet, and *Logopolis*, a strange and cerebral meditation on entropy, death, and Platonic mathematics, but also the two distinct eras that rose and fell between them. And that's before you start looking into the aesthetic politics of the Nathan-Turner era and confronting the fact that the series declined and got cancelled under his watch, which, to say the least, has made him rather unpopular in some circles.

Indeed, there's something of a cottage industry in re-evaluating John Nathan-Turner these days. A recent biography got quite a bit of press attention when it revealed some sex scandals that took place during his reign, *Doctor Who*

Magazine did a two-part retrospective called "The Trial of John Nathan-Turner" (he was acquitted, in part on the basis of evidence provided by Steven Moffat), and even *Newsnight* found itself running a ten-minute segment on whether Doctor Who was crap in the 1980s (inconclusive).

What follows here is manifestly not an attempt to give a history of the Nathan-Turner years –after all, more than fifty essays between this book and the next two volumes will cover all that. Instead, this is an attempt to try to discern what creative vision John Nathan-Turner himself might be said to have. This is, perhaps surprisingly, not entirely easy. Because the change from *The Leisuire Hive* to *Survival* is so dramatic, it's easy to lose the forest for the trees. On top of that, Nathan-Turner's aesthetic vision manifests in a very different way from past producers. He is the first producer since Innes Lloyd who was not a writer. This means that his era unfolds in a very different way from, say, the Graham Williams era. Williams had three script editors, but maintained a fairly consistent tone and approach across them. Nathan-Turner had three script editors, and the result is three separate and distinct Nathan-Turner eras: the cerebral science fiction of Christopher Bidmead, the action-packed grit of Eric Saward, and the hip and politicized Andrew Cartmel era.

From these descriptions, one might be tempted to suggest that the Nathan-Turner era is characterized by a certain serious-mindedness, and this is in practice true. One of the first things Nathan-Turner did was to pare back the amount of humor in the scripts. But this was at least in part a reaction against the power that Tom Baker had accumulated over six years in the lead role. Baker had become, charitably, difficult to work with, and Nathan-Turner, as an incoming producer, faced a problem not unlike the one Innes Lloyd faced with William Hartnell in 1966. Their solutions were ultimately similar: assert their power and don't worry about alienating the star. And the results were ultimately similar as well: they very quickly got their lead actors to retire, allowing them to revamp the behind-the-scenes tone of the production. And since Tom Baker loved the humorous bits of the Doctor, those were the bits Nathan-Turner sought to constrain.

And yet for all of this, everything about Nathan-Turner suggests he had little commitment to the "dark and epic" and considerable commitment to a relatively comedic aesthetic of light entertainment. Nathan-Turner was a flamboyant man with a penchant for Hawaiian shirts – indeed, it's often been suggested that Colin Baker's costume and characterization were heavily modeled off of Nathan-Turner himself. His suggestions and input on the show often had a certain levity to them as well: things like the casting of Bonnie Langford as the companion, or, for that matter, the crossing over of Doctor Who with *EastEnders* for the 30th anniversary, give a pretty solid sense of where his instincts lay. Indeed, there's a deep irony in the fact that the producer who finally grew fed up with Tom Baker's behavior and pushed him out was also the one who, in earlier years, might have listened to Tom Baker's infamous suggestion that the companion be replaced by a talking vegetable perched on the Doctors' shoulder,

shrugged, and said, "Sure, let's give it a try."

Within this it's possible to see one of the essential paradoxes of the Nathan-Turner era: a producer whose instincts swung towards a particular sort of levity consistently hired script editors whose instincts swung very differently. This resulted in a relatively schizoid series that was often pulled in two very different directions, which was, as one might expect, a curse as often as it was a blessing.

It is here we must turn to the big cloud that hangs over the Nathan-Turner era, one we've already discussed within this book, which is to say, fandom. The Nathan-Turner era marked the first time that the series engaged heavily and directly with its fandom. Again, this is something we've talked about elsewhere, in particular in terms of the fan-industrial complex, and it's true that Nathan-Turner's efforts to reach out to fandom had, at times, a cynical and unfortunate tinge. It's also true that they backfired spectacularly in a number of ways, most notably in his decision to appoint an unofficial fan liaison/continuity advisor in the form of Ian Levine, who would turn out to be, charitably, a deeply problematic figure.

One thing that has to be noted, then, is that for all of his reaching out to fandom, Nathan-Turner was in some key ways doomed in terms of fandom. Because the underlying instincts and values of sci-fi fans, especially in the era Nathan-Turner was working in, were fundamentally more in line with those of Bidmead, Saward, and Cartmel than they were with Nathan-Turner. Indeed, there's a strong case to be made that Nathan-Turner's decision to appoint script editors with instincts very different from his own came out of his understanding that the audience wanted something that he himself was ill-equipped to provide. And so it's perhaps unsurprising that Nathan-Turner's light entertainment instincts would ultimately annoy fandom in the same way that the Williams era did, leaving him as the fall guy while his collaborators all had solid excuses. The fact that Nathan-Turner was outlived by almost all of his major creative collaborators surely does him no favors either: Colin Baker, Eric Saward, Andrew Cartmel, and the rest are all able to tell their stories and make their excuses, whereas Nathan-Turner is tragically and eternally silent.

But reaching out to fandom in the first place also highlights Nathan-Turner's greatest strength, which is that he was a creature of television. He'd worked on Doctor Who in a variety of capacities since *The Space Pirates*, and was a seasoned industry veteran. As budgets collapsed and ratings dwindled, it was often Nathan-Turner's skill and ingenuity that kept the series afloat, whether because of his creative accounting or because of his knack for generating headlines and publicity. A season of Doctor Who under Nathan-Turner was a stage-managed event with sequential reveals and "big deal" episodes in a way that was spectacularly ahead of its time. Whatever his faults, and however poorly his ideas sometimes worked out, Nathan-Turner was committed to making the program feel fresh and new at every turn. Indeed, there's an uncomfortable truth to be admitted: of all of his predecessors, it is John Nathan-Turner whose

Doctor Who Russell T. Davies's work most resembles.

And in 1980, inheriting the program, he already had a big problem. His decision to reach out to fandom and to actively manage the show's reception among dedicated fans proved a supremely savvy move, in that he anticipated and was able to react on the fly to the collapse of the Saturday evening schedule in which Doctor Who had existed for eighteen years, reimagining the show as, in effect, a sci-fi soap for the dedicated.

It is easy to forget that light entertainment makes up an awful lot of what television is, because light entertainment is, by its nature and design, disposable. But another way of phrasing this is that light entertainment is the television of the now. To be a creature of light entertainment, as Nathan-Turner was, is very much to be in touch with the day-to-day instincts of television. But this also means that, because he worked so much on Doctor Who, a program with dedicated and obsessive fans, Nathan-Turner's own work has survived where the cultural context it fit into has largely fallen away. This is a significant problem for anyone watching the stories: they are designed to fit into a cultural context that not only has long since passed, but that is poorly preserved at best.

But for all of this, it is worth stressing the extent to which Nathan-Turner's approach has largely been vindicated. I already noted that the Russell T. Davies era bears more than a passing resemblance to Nathan-Turner's work, but it's worth stressing the degree to which this is true. Davies was always quick to draw on the broader scope of what television was, picking not just (or even primarily) from other dramas, but incorporating newscasts and brief cameos from television presenters into a style that owes a recognizable debt to Nathan-Turner. Certainly Davies's heavy intersection of Doctor Who and soap operas feels like it pays off an idea Nathan-Turner never quite realized (not least because it was something Eric Saward had zero interest in, although that's really a topic for the next book).

And it's also worth noting how ahead of his time Nathan-Turner was when supervising the VHS line. Nathan-Turner oversaw numerous clip show tapes like *Daleks: The Early Years* or *The Hartnell Years* that consisted of some documentary presentations framed around orphaned episodes from otherwise wiped serials. These were quite savvy at the time – as much as some fans muttered in irritation at the release of these while high-profile and beloved stories were held back, the truth was that fandom quickly developed an elaborate and ad hoc network of tape trading that meant that anyone desperate to see *The Face of Evil* or *The Greatest Show in the Galaxy* could probably find a copy, whereas the lone surviving episodes of *The Crusade* or *Evil of the Daleks* were only ever screened at conventions. And it is similarly worth pointing out that whatever stick these releases may have gotten at the time, they're also basically the prototypes of what the vast quantities of special features on DVDs would eventually come to look like.

Which is to say: yes, there clearly is such a thing as a Nathan-Turner era, and while it is an era in which the program steadily declines and eventually falls,

it's one where it falls slower and with more grace than it would have in the hands of almost any other producer. Nathan-Turner's faults are all amplified by a variety of circumstances, and his virtues are made too easy to ignore. But he was a man with a clear creative vision, and one that the show needed at the time. That he's become a metonym for everything that will go wrong over the next fifty plus essays is understandable, but still deeply and fundamentally misleading.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*Quatermass*, *Day of the Triffids, Blake's 7, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, Alien, Sapphire and Steel*)

Normally it's fairly easy to pick what goes into a Pop Between Realities essay. I mean, I tend to put them in whenever the series goes on any sort of break, and I just grab two, sometimes three pieces of relevant media or history from the time period, and it all works fairly naturally. This period of time, however, is not normal. It's absolutely packed with major sci-fi things on television that need to be talked about – and this entry isn't even going to come close to covering all of it (most notably skipping *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*'s television adaptation and *The Adventure Game*, which will be covered in the next book).

Accordingly, this essay is, unlike the typical Pop Between Realities piece, a collection of mini-essays. John Nathan-Turner and Christopher Bidmead are about to determinately reshape what Doctor Who is in order to make it work better as proper science fiction television. In which case the obvious question is… what does science fiction look like around this point in time?

Well, it looks like…

Quatermass (1979)

In late 1979 ITV ran a four part Quatermass serial produced by Verity Lambert simply called *Quatermass*. The film version for the export market went instead with the title *The Quatermass Conclusion*. The production was the very definition of problematic. Its creator, Nigel Kneale, wrote his scripts in 1973 for a BBC production that got abandoned. Following the success of *Star Wars*, however, everyone became obsessed with science fiction, and Euston Films snapped up the rights to the scripts, where they were rewritten to work both as a 200 minute serial and as a 100 minute film.

The results were frankly unfortunate. Lambert's production values were impeccable, and the film (which is the version I watched) looks quite solid. The problem here really is one of an unfixable underlying concept. Verity Lambert's defense of the project – that there are problems inherent in any effort to update an old concept like this – isn't entirely fair. After all, plenty of other science fiction revivals have worked. But on the other hand it's not as though there were a long line of successful television revivals to begin with. This is probably about as good a Quatermass story as could have been made in 1979.

The problem is that Quatermass didn't fit 1979 at all. And the blame here really goes to Nigel Kneale. That Kneale's writing is conservative is hardly a revelation. But by 1979 that had unfortunately shifted into overdrive. Quatermass is so appallingly reactionary as to occasionally tip over into comedy. Its central premise involves mind-controlling aliens whose mind control doesn't affect old people. It largely concerns itself with the dangers of hippies and how they contribute to urban decay. The other part of its premise is that there's a cult called the Planet People, who believe that aliens are nicely transporting them to a utopia on another world when in fact they're just being incinerated.

Kneale has said that he feels the Planet People should have been portrayed as punks instead of hippies, which makes sense: not only are punks more intuitively connected with gang violence and urban decay, they're also well known for their tendency to gather in stone circles to await their alien saviors. Which is to say that the real problem here isn't just that the script is hopelessly reactionary but that it's written by someone so utterly out of touch that he can't even be reactionary effectively. Dystopian science fiction in which there is a sense of imminent danger based on existing trends is one thing, but doing "five minutes into the future" stuff in which those damn kids have ruined society and only the smart old people can save it is just bewildering. To do it with no understanding that punks and hippies are so keenly different is just stupid. It was vile when Haisman and Lincoln did it in 1969 with *The Dominators*. A decade later and coming from someone who was, in his time, a far better writer, it's just sad.

But there's a larger conservatism to this. Kneale is still writing with the idea that government-funded elites can fix everything if only the chattering masses would shut up and leave them alone. It's not just the loathsome politics of the piece that kills it, it's the fact that it entirely acts as though no valid or interesting question has been raised about the nature of authority since the 1950s that might possibly justify altering its approach to science fiction. The result is, essentially, one hundred minutes of Nigel Kneale yelling at the damn kids to get off his lawn.

Day of the Triffids **(1981)**

It is perhaps tempting to treat *Quatermass* as if it somehow implicates the more classic tradition of British science fiction and shows that it doesn't have legs in the early 1980s. After *Star Wars*, when science fiction was just another flavor of action-adventure, the serious-minded science fiction of the 1950s was a relic, for better or for worse. Tempting as it may be, however, it would also be demonstrably wrong, given that *Day of the Triffid*s is visibly one of the best pieces of science fiction of the 1980s.

Based on John Wyndham's 1951 novel, *Day of the Triffids* can roughly be described as *Survivors* done right, although to be fair, it's more accurate to say that *Survivors* is *Day of the Triffids* done wrong. Both are post-apocalyptic survivor stories of an essentially British type, but there's a bravery and confidence to *Day*

of the Triffids that *Survivors* never really managed.

Indeed, *Day of the Triffids* is a textbook example of something that learned the correct lesson from *Star Wars*: the public is comfortable enough with science fiction that you can just do drama with science fiction in it and be confident about it. *Day of the Triffids* is, at its heart, a story about being alone in a crowd that uses a world with giant man-eating plants to tell itself. This contrasts it immediately with both *Survivors* and *Quatermass*, which are, at their core, fables. *Survivors* is a moral parable about the virtues of good middle class English folk, and *Quatermass* is a moral parable about how Nigel Kneale is a cranky old man.

Whereas *Day of the Triffids* is first and foremost a story about people. *Survivors*, at least, spends some time being that at the beginning before it wanders off into stupidity, but *Day of the Triffids* also has the good sense to be a miniseries that shows how the big disaster affects the characters, and then ends before it runs out of things to do. Its characters aren't bland archetypes that can be described as "the _____ one." They're not epically deep portraits of humanity either, just characters for us to think about and get to know. The first episode consists of the main character in his hospital bed waiting for a doctor who never comes to take the bandages off his eye. He narrates his story in flashback, and we spend the whole time getting to know him and his world before the post-apocalyptic stuff kicks up. It's a gorgeous bit of structure, and one that grounds the story in people.

A glance at the production credits quickly shows what's up. This is produced by David Maloney, better known to us as the director of classics like *Genesis of the Daleks, The Mind Robber, The War Games, The Deadly Assassin, The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, and a few other stories. He's an old pro at science fiction and one with the confidence to do what this story requires: calmly and without fuss make serious drama with man-eating plants in it. And, equally crucially, recognize that there's a difference between serious drama with man-eating plants in it and serious drama about man-eating plants.

Blake's 7 **(1978-1981)**

Sadly, Maloney was not so lucky in his other major contribution to British sci-fi television of the era. *Blake's 7*, and the apostrophe is strictly a lexical courtesy, is a classic example of an almost great show. It's tempting to suggest that its key problem is that it's created by Terry Nation – and certainly the fact that he wrote all of the scripts in the first season despite not actually having a season's worth of material doesn't help the series. But with a production team including both Chris Boucher and David Maloney, that shouldn't be that massive a barrier.

The problem is that it's too often a BBC-budgeted *Star Trek* where everybody hates each other. Only one of these ideas is an inherent flaw, and to their credit the days of the BBC trying to do *Star Trek* are basically at an end as of here. The larger problem is that they don't quite hit the characterization for

what they're trying to do. The characters are all just a bit too programmatic for their conflicts and arguments to be compelling.

It is, actually, helpful to compare it to *Day of the Triffids*. There too the characters aren't massively brilliant (though they're mostly better than *Blake's 7*), but at least the drama isn't centered on the fact that everybody is constantly at each other's throats. When your drama is based primarily on everyone being furious at one another and constantly betraying each other then the bar for what makes an effective character is a bit higher.

Or maybe it's just that after *Firefly* it's tough to swallow the same basic show being done by Terry Nation. But the criticism here is merely "This isn't a mind-blowing classic of science fiction," not "This isn't good." *Blake's 7* is, in fact, extremely good. It does some things very well. Certainly it shows that people are putting a real effort into trying to do new things with the standard space opera formula. And the final episode bears some real mention, as it's one of the great final episodes in all of television.

In it, they bring back Blake (who left the series after the second season) and have Avon (his replacement as the main character) kill him with a fantastically large explosion of blood. (This was at the request of Gareth Thomas, who wanted to make sure that nobody would think his character could ever come back. Apparently even he was quite surprised at how much blood there was.) Then the entire cast is shot down over the course of a few minutes, save for Avon, who is surrounded by men with guns. He smiles, and the screen cuts to black as the sound of gunfire rings out. It's a stunningly, aggressively bleak finish, and for that alone deserves some real credit.

Of course, Paul Darrow, who plays Avon, has several times pushed for a theory that suggests that Avon ducks as the screen cuts out, the dozen or so guards all shoot each other, and he escapes to create a sequel series. And fans of *Blake's 7* have taken this seriously. That, I think, tells you everything you need to know about *Blake's 7* and its fans.

Buck Rogers in the 25th Century **(1979/1980)**

A fairly often-discussed point regarding the "new look" John Nathan-Turner era that we'll finally start talking about in the next essay is that its ratings early on were abominable. So bad, in fact, that ITV's attempted counter-programming of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* was winning the timeslot. And it's true, the ratings were very, very bad – bad enough that during *Full Circle* they fell to 3.7 million. The lowest point of the Sylvester McCoy era, for comparison, was 3.1m, and that was still better-ranked in the week than *Full Circle*'s nadir. Its second episode, at 170th place for the week, appears at a brief glance to be the worst position on the chart that Doctor Who ever attained.

Many words have been spilled attempting to explain what the hell happened. And it's genuinely difficult to explain. It cannot be said to be a straightforward result of Nathan-Turner's taking the helm, because the drop

happened with his first episode. Episode Four of *The Horns of Nimon* pulled 10.4 million and was 26th for the week. Episode One of *The Leisure Hive* pulled 5.9 million and was 77th. And whatever one might say about *The Horns of Nimon*, its ratings grew with each subsequent episode. The ratings for the first portion of Season Eighteen were, by any measure, a disaster. But after an episode of *State of Decay* that pulled 5.4 million viewers and was 125th for the week, Doctor Who took a Christmas break. When it came back, it pulled 7.1 million and was 88th for the week and stayed in that general ballpark for the rest of the season.

Setting aside the "why" – a topic that there's never going to be a clear-cut answer for anyway – the fact remains that in 1980, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* was immediately and directly more popular than Doctor Who. This fact, it must be noted, is depressing as all hell, because *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* is not even remotely a good show. With Gil Gerrard playing Buck Rogers as a sort of cross between William Shatner and Adam West except without the necessary irony, some astonishingly gaudy and generic space sets, and a sense of plotting that's little more than an incompetent execution of clichés, it is, in fact, really awful.

"Planet of the Amazon Women" serves as a fairly standard episode. The plot centers on a planet that is kidnapping men and selling them as husbands because its male population has been decimated. Half the scenes in the first half are based around Buck Rogers and other husbands-to-be not knowing what's going on before they figure things out. One scene is based around Rogers remaining calm while the other characters panic under the belief that they're about to head off towards some kind of human sacrifice or gladiatorial games. It's a decent idea that centers on an interesting twist and subversion of the usual way that captured sci-fi heroes work. And it's a perfectly good hero moment – one in which the hero knows more than the audience and thus impresses the audience.

Except that the other half of the scenes have already given away the overwhelming majority of the plot, which makes all of the scenes that hinge on the mystery of what's going to happen to the characters fall flat. The entire episode, in fact, plays out as though nobody has thought even a little bit about when or how to reveal information to the audience. Large swaths of the scenes are clearly there to tick off boxes. An entire subplot exists not because anything happens in it but to give the comedy robot, Twiki, who is easily the worst comedy robot I have ever seen, an appropriate number of jokes. The show is cynical and uninterested in doing anything but stringing together action sequences with a plot basic enough that nobody will fail to follow it.

As with its creator's previous *Star Wars* ripoff, *Battlestar Galactica*, the series enjoyed some brief popularity before getting canned. It was in no way what audiences wanted, but rather an attempt to give them something supposedly just like what they had previously enjoyed yet was, in practice, nothing more than a warmed over and cynical attempt at capturing what even *Blake's 7* can't manage with some far better writers. For those who want to argue that *Star Wars* killed

science fiction there is little better ammunition.

Alien (1979)

More accurately, though, *Star Wars* killed a certain approach to science fiction. The "SF" or "hard" model of science fiction was already dead when *Star Wars* hit the scene. *Star Wars*, however, took the space swashbuckler approach to its limit and effectively killed it in the process. Simply put, nobody was going to top *Star Wars* in the *Buck Rogers* clone department. Not even, as we've seen, *Buck Rogers*. As I've been yammering on for several essays, what *Star Wars* did was show that science fiction could be taken for granted.

But that's far from the death of science fiction. It's just the death of a pair of exceedingly programmatic models of science fiction – the science logic puzzles that characterize much of the so-called "golden age," and the "pulp adventure… in space!" approach that *Star Wars* itself embodies. In many ways, then, it's the birth of science fiction in a general sense. *Star Wars* made it OK to just go ahead and use imaginary forms of knowledge to tell stories that couldn't be told with entirely real things, which liberated science fiction from its two most popular niches.

Which brings us around to *Alien*. If *Star Wars* is the film that opened the door to the possibility that science fiction doesn't have to be an end in itself, then *Alien* is the film that decisively walked through that door. There is nothing particularly original about *Alien* in its conception. It's a derivative piece of science fiction that despite being a near-exact copy of *The Ark in Space* there's no reason whatsoever to think the two have any direct connection. What *Alien* illustrates is not a clever or novel idea but rather the sorts of things that can be done with science fiction in 1979 that, culturally speaking, couldn't be done in 1975.

Back in the *Nightmare of Eden* essay we talked about a style of storytelling in which concept and event are indistinguishable. *Alien* is a prime example of this, especially when contrasted with *The Ark in Space*. *The Ark in Space* is a teleplay. Its events are people acting on a set. It's a very nice set with some real care taken in it, and the people act very well, but it's still just people acting on a set to tell a story. That story is about aliens for whom humans are meat.

Alien, on the other hand, is a film in which every single part of the design is created to generate a coherent experience. It is a film about being chased through dark and cramped corridors by a monster for whom humans are meat. It is a film about human spaces that are violated by the horrifically other. So the spaceship is made to be effectively chased through. The alien is made to be visually horrifying and visceral and to work well in shadows and fragments. The editing is done so that the calm sterility of the beginning of the film gives way to quick cuts and camera movements as the characters are hunted. Everything is about being trapped and hunted. The story of *Alien* cannot meaningfully be separated from its experience. (Indeed, the film is thoroughly unimpressive as described, which

is why it took me nearly thirty years to ever get around to seeing it. It is, of course, as good as everyone says, but its plot – a crew is hunted one-by-one by what is at this point a familiar movie monster – does nothing to recommend it.)

It is, unfortunately, miles beyond what Doctor Who can do in 1980. But the underlying approach works even if the specific techniques are beyond the show. With the technology that is shifting in the BBC – the introduction of Steadicam back in *Destiny of the Daleks*, the introduction of Quantel Paintbox in the next story, and other more sophisticated techniques – the show is rapidly gaining ways to make what happens on screen and the idea behind the story into a single thing. This isn't to say that the language of television is just a primitive form of film – it's not, and there are techniques that Doctor Who is going to pick up that could not work in film, though most of those start in during the Peter Davison era. But *Alien* shows how it could be done.

Notably, however, a television version of this sort of storytelling also existed in 1979.

Sapphire & Steel (1979-1982)

Occasionally, in the course of doing the Pop Between Realities essays, I get absolutely blown away. It's rare. *Children of the Stones* genuinely impressed me. *Doomwatch* was considerably better than I thought it would be. And, I mean, there are other things I've covered that I really liked, but they were ones I knew how much I'd like going in. But *Sapphire & Steel* knocked my socks off. It was stunning. One of the best pieces of science fiction television I've ever seen, in fact.

Part of it is simply surprise on my part. It's an impressive little Trojan Horse of a series: an odd and inverted mirror of what it initially appears to be. On the surface it's a straightforward show that feels almost like a light ripoff of Doctor Who. Steel and his assistant Sapphire, who appear human but aren't, show up where odd things are going wrong with time and fix them. But beneath the surface the whole thing exists at a slight angle to expectations.

First of all, who Sapphire and Steel are, and how what they do actually works, is left unexplained – not merely unexplained in the sense of pre-*War Games* Doctor Who, but in a more fundamental sense. There's an odd incoherence to the entire premise. Even the opening narration doesn't quite make sense: "All irregularities will be handled by the forces controlling each dimension. Transuranic, heavy elements may not be used where there is life. Medium atomic weights are available: Gold, Lead, Copper, Jet, Diamond, Radium, Sapphire, Silver and Steel. Sapphire and Steel have been assigned." An explanation of what happens exists – creatures roam along the corridor of time and break in at weak points where there's an anachronism, including something as innocuous as a nursery rhyme – but it too can only sort of be described as sensible.

It's also phenomenally well-made. David McCallum's performance as Steel

is so obviously an inspiration for Sylvester McCoy's Doctor that I'm astonished the two aren't mentioned in the same breath and with great frequency. Joanna Lumley isn't quite as phenomenal as Sapphire, though she's still raw class in the role. But what's really amazing is the way in which it makes deft use of its studio sets. It was an inexpensive program that has one location shoot in its entire run. What is usually said is that this was used to create a sense of claustrophobia, but it's more complex than that. What the show does is look like a fairly straightforward piece of children's television made on cheap video. It feels as though it fits seamlessly and smoothly into that genre.

But as with its basic narrative premise, it is continually not quite right. It's far creepier than it has any right to be. Its narratives hold together not on science fiction logic, but on associative and emotional logic. The monsters overtly feed on emotions, and though everyone involved acts as though the stories are science fiction, their logic never actually follows that course. The result is a show that is deeply unsettling because the unknown is always immediately present. It's not just a world full of lurking horrors and creepy music, but one that feels as though it is beyond understanding even as it threatens. It's familiar enough to follow what's going on but never familiar enough to let you feel comfortable.

And equally crucially, this is, in a very real sense, the television version of what *Alien* is doing. *Sapphire & Steel* is a show about the frisson between the familiar world and the lurking uncanny; it's shot as an uncanny version of a familiar type of television. It stars familiar television actors but keeps them cold and distant and denies them showboating "hero" moments. Everything about it is made with the same slight gap between familiar and strange. It's got a real claim to being the first piece of science fiction television to pull off the *Alien* technique of having every part of the production be inseparable from the act of storytelling.

Plus it's just really well written. Its most famous moment is justly in its second storyline, with a glorious climax where Steel callously sacrifices an innocent man's life, arguing and bargaining with the unseen monster who has possessed Sapphire and given her an impressively creepy facial prosthesis of a maggoty face. It's a jaw-dropping piece of drama.

It's also, of the things we've discussed, the one closest to the realm of what Doctor Who can take as a direct model. (Indeed, it is basically the model for the McCoy years, as I said. *Ghost Light* may as well be a *Sapphire & Steel* story.) This isn't entirely surprising. It's a direct heir to the Hinchcliffe era, so it makes sense that the two would be rejoined. (And, of course, PJ Hammond, who wrote the bulk of *Sapphire & Steel*, got picked up by Russell T Davies to do *Torchwood*.) But there's a more fundamental connection underlying the two shows. On a basic level, *Sapphire & Steel's* attitude towards storytelling and genre is very compatible with Doctor Who. At their best, both shows are ones where the premise is not the point of the show but a tool to do unusual and compelling things. And what *Sapphire & Steel* shows – really what all of the successful things covered in this entry show – is that what can be done with a premise is rapidly expanding. That,

more than anything, is the challenge facing Doctor Who at the start of 1980: discover how to use the premise of the TARDIS in a new era of television.

You've Discovered Television (*The Leisure Hive*)

It's August 30th, 1980. David Bowie is at number one with "Ashes to Ashes," which is, broadly speaking, one of the best songs ever. A week later The Jam take over with "Start." Then comes Kelly Marie with "Feels Like I'm in Love," which holds the spot through the end of the story. Gary Numan, Elvis Presley, Stevie Wonder, ABBA, and Queen all chart.

Since Graham Crowden cracked up while dying, and ignoring the hypothetical we covered during *Shada*, the Soviet Union had its first rock music festival, then killed fifty people as a Volstok-2M rocket exploded on the launch pad. The 1980 Olympics happened, which the United States boycotted. Riots broke out in the St. Paul's area of Bristol. The origins of the riot are unclear, but the underlying racial tensions and anger over police racial profiling are searingly obvious, and this will become a pattern over the early 1980s. Also, the US severed diplomatic relations with Iran, and mounted a disastrous attempt to rescue the hostages held there.

Speaking of Iran, terrorists took over the Iranian embassy in London, with the SAS retaking it five days later. Ian Curtis, the lead singer of Joy Division, killed himself. A month later Joy Division had its first charting single with "Love Will Tear Us Apart." Both *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Pac-Man* came out, one the day after the other. CNN was launched and eight days later got to cover Richard Pryor immolating himself while trying to freebase cocaine. 1,700 people died in a heat wave in the US, and Ronald Reagan won the Republican nomination for President at a convention where, bowing to pressure from the religious right, the party dropped its support for the Equal Rights Amendment. By legend, copies of JG Ballard's story "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan" are passed around at the convention by people mistaking them as a serious study of Reagan's strengths as a candidate.

While during this story Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope run to raise awareness of cancer comes to an end when it turns out that his cancer has spread to his lungs. There's a military coup in Turkey, the Solidarity union is founded in Poland after weeks of strikes in Gdansk, and, um… not a lot else, I'm afraid, so let's move on to *The Leisure Hive*.

On the one hand, we have effectively begun the third volume of the Tom Baker era, albeit one so short it doesn't really make sense to publish it as a separate book. Without Baker's seventh season, his era would divide neatly into two halves: the Hinchcliffe half and the Williams half, each with their own aesthetic goals and purposes. Season Eighteen, however, does not really match either of those eras – it is its own beast, with its own interests.

On the other hand, as I've suggested in several entries, the dramatic

difference between the Williams and Nathan-Turner eras is a product of Nathan-Turner's own invention. There are many ways to frame this fact. Certainly what I've referred to as the fan-industrial complex plays into it. This is visible even when looking at artifacts from the time period. What is now *Doctor Who Magazine* started in the closing days of the Williams era as *Doctor Who Weekly,* and it consisted purely of comics and lashed-together text pieces on the history of the program. But as Nathan-Turner took over, two things happened. First, the magazine changed to *Doctor Who Monthly*, although this was mainly a sales decision. Second, and more importantly, it started to actively engage with the program that was actually on the air.

Let's say that again, because it's a fact about the magazine that is absolutely crucial to everything that's going to happen over the next decade, and yet nevertheless it's almost wholly unremarked on. During the Williams era, which the magazine overlapped for a good few months, the magazine did not actually directly refer to what was currently going on in Doctor Who itself at all save for in its letter pages. It was purely a Doctor Who comic book with some text pieces, many of them not actually about the series. Then John Nathan-Turner took over, and the magazine began transitioning to its current status as a professional and official fanzine. This started with a location report of the Brighton filming for *The Leisure Hive*, then continued with photo previews of upcoming stories, interviews with Nathan-Turner, the magazine's first-ever review of a televised story (Jeremy Bentham's exceedingly congratulatory take on *The Leisure Hive*, which went out of its way to credit John Nathan-Turner with immediately improving the show's quality), an end-of-season retrospective with Nathan-Turner, and so on.

In other words, as of this story Doctor Who began historicizing itself even as it was being made. The paratext (a term in literary criticism and theory that basically means "all the stuff about a book that isn't the actual string of characters constituting the book" – i.e. the cover, the advertising, interviews with the author, etc.) of Doctor Who is, as of now, part of Doctor Who. And this is not something that has ever or will ever stop. From *The Leisure Hive* on, any competent reading of Doctor Who has to remain aware of the paratext because the paratext is genuinely part of the storytelling. Things that happen on-screen may have a dramatic resonance provided to them by what happens off-screen.

Last essay, I suggested that there were techniques that were unique to television. This is one of them – an expansion of the principle suggested by the cliffhanger that has been invoked by this project for some time. If we take the cliffhanger not as a momentary event but as a week-long process of interaction with the narrative, then Nathan-Turner's approach of having a continual story of Doctor Who's production running alongside the show is an expansion of this. Doctor Who, from this point on, begins actively telling its story not merely through what happens on screen but through what happens off the screen and during the moments the show is not transmitting. (Eventually a paratextual model of film arises – it's central to the way that the "summer blockbuster" now

works, with the actual release of the movie merely being the climactic event of an often years-long paratextual piece of storytelling – but it starts with television, and Doctor Who is an early adopter.)

If we wanted to be cheeky, and frankly, I kind of do, we could suggest that this, more than anything, is the real revolution of the Nathan-Turner years. Certainly it is a real revolution, and one that eventually proves to have a nasty, nasty downside for the show. The fan-industrial complex and all of its problems are, in many ways, simply a particularly disastrous instance of this idea of using the paratext of television as part of the storytelling. To some extent this problem can be summed up as, "It eventually gets to where the only way to follow Doctor Who is to be an obsessive fan." And, correspondingly, one of the successes of the new series can be summed up as, "It figured out how to make much of the paratext a value-added extra instead of a prerequisite." (Though notably, some paratext is still necessary to understanding the show at all. The new series requires that the audience know what a season premiere or a season finale is in a way that the classic series never did.)

But this is not the real revolution. Even if the biggest part of the John Nathan-Turner revolution was in fact the announcement of the John-Nathan Turner revolution, it's not the only part. The nature of paratextual storytelling is that it tends to rely on a fairly complex linkage of events. First the John Nathan-Turner revolution is announced in the pages of *Doctor Who Monthly*. Then, when the series premieres, there are a host of superficial but visible changes: a new title sequence, new theme music, a new costume for the Doctor, and a new style to the incidental music, all of which create a strong sense of change. None of these are huge changes to the show, of course. Several are things that have happened before without major comment.

Again, you can see Nathan-Turner constructing a complex meta-narrative of Doctor Who. Changing all of those things at once, including something as inviolate as the theme music, which had remained virtually unaltered in its iconic (and most brilliant) Delia Derbyshire arrangement since 1963, makes a powerful statement of reinvention even if you don't do anything else at all. Combined with the bits of heraldry in *Doctor Who Monthly,* you get a very effective performance of a revolution.

I don't mean this to suggest that the John Nathan-Turner revolution was all hype. It wasn't. What I mean to suggest is that the John Nathan-Turner revolution was stage-managed. It was a carefully designed event. Considerable time and effort was made to have *The Leisure Hive* appear like a big change. And this is where Miles and Wood's competing reviews on this story fall flat. Wood stages a cute little experiment of showing people a clip of *The Leisure Hive* and a clip of *Nightmare of Eden* and asking which one was the "slick, modern" production, and takes the fact that *Nightmare of Eden* was said to look better as evidence that there was no Nathan-Turner revolution. Miles, for his part, goes to equally great lengths to show how anyone who was paying attention would have noticed the difference in production.

But neither of them bothers to think about the fact that even someone paying no attention at all would notice that one of the most iconic theme songs in television history had changed. What happens after the fade to the Brighton beach is almost immaterial to this. You don't need to be paying attention. The series is screaming at the top of its lungs, "I have been reinvented!" That constitutes a reinvention. Even someone only half-watching while they read the paper would have an immediate and tangible sense that something was different. The question is whether they could have articulated what beyond the superficial.

In some ways it is best if they couldn't. This story and the next are often read as "false starts" for an era that begins in proper with *Full Circle*. But this attitude misses the point. Nathan-Turner is engaging in a savvier sort of television production than that. There are in effect two Nathan-Turner revolutions that go on simultaneously but at different paces. The first is the visible revolution marked by the paratextual material. The second is a still visible but much subtler revolution, which is slower. While part of this second revolution hinges on the emergence of the paratext as part of Doctor Who, there are other more important components to it.

These other components also help explain why this was a slow revolution. For one thing, they're considerably more complex – indeed, Nathan-Turner has some genuine problems with parts of them, which is why both *The Leisure Hive* and *Meglos* are kind of weak as stories. For another, large parts of them are simply a matter of accelerating the changes that were already happening in the late Williams era – most obviously in *Destiny of the Daleks* and *Nightmare of Eden*.

Simply put, Nathan-Turner wanted to change the show from being about comedy to being about visual science-fiction storytelling. But he made this change over several stories. In this regard, the change is much like previous changes. Hinchcliffe didn't just junk the UNIT format and run off cackling in another direction. He engaged in a steady two-and-a-half-year separation of the Doctor from Earth-centric storytelling. Lloyd didn't just abandon historicals in favor of bases under siege in one week. Letts worked within the inherited UNIT structure for six stories before doing *Colony in Space*. Even Williams started his era with *The Horror of Fang Rock*, a story that owed much to the Hinchcliffe era before it.

Similarly, Nathan-Turner started by taking a comedy script from David Fisher of the sort that had appeared in each of the last two seasons and tried to do a better job with it than Graham Williams would have. This had mixed results. His decision to cut out all of the jokes was misguided, not least because it required quite a bit of padding to make up for it, like the absurdly bad sequence consisting of a minute-and-a-half pan across beach chairs on an abandoned Brighton beach. (This also gets at what will eventually prove to be the more problematic aspect of Nathan-Turner's use of the paratext: he defended it in an interview on the grounds that they had to reintroduce the series and introduce Baker's new costume. Left conspicuously unanswered [and courteously unasked] is why the heck the fact that Tom Baker is wearing new clothes was seen as

something confusing enough to require active introduction, or how ninety seconds of beach chairs served to accomplish this introduction.) The result is a story that feels confused, as if the show doesn't quite know what it wants to be. Which, to be fair, it doesn't yet.

But Nathan-Turner also takes a decisive step towards fixing another problem – one that is probably essential to the series surviving the season. Over the course of the Williams era Doctor Who had very much become The Tom Baker Show. This is not inherently a bad thing. Tom Baker is a marvelous performer, his Doctor is understandably the most popular of the classic series Doctors, and The Tom Baker Show was reliably entertaining and often much better than anything else going on in the show itself. However, The Tom Baker Show has one major weakness that Doctor Who doesn't, which is that if Tom Baker leaves it's dead in the water.

Simply put, it's very difficult to imagine how Doctor Who could have survived under Graham Williams if Tom Baker had actually carried through on his frequent threats to quit. Not that Williams couldn't have done anything else – truth be told, Williams probably would have made a better show with someone other than Baker starring in it. Nonetheless, Baker was irreplaceable within the context of what the show was at the time. And *The Leisure Hive* goes to considerable lengths to decentralize Baker. Sure, the opening – an incredibly boring ninety-second shot that finally pays off with Baker's appearance – is as flagrant an instance of "let's all cherish the leading man" as the show has ever engaged in, but by the end of the first episode Baker is being rent from limb to limb as he screams, and the end of the second episode dramatically hyper-ages the Doctor into a decrepit old man. These are small things, but they flag that the Doctor is vulnerable. He's not the narrative center of the universe any more. And, misguided as it is, the reduction in the number of jokes points to this as well. By removing the means by which Baker can dominate a story and by making him vulnerable, Nathan-Turner, from the first episode of his tenure, is working to make it so that the show can handle Baker's eventual departure.

And then there are the visuals, which are markedly different. It's worth comparing *The Leisure Hive* to *The Creature from the Pit*, from the same writer a year earlier. *Creature from the Pit* is ultimately framed and shot like theater, with the cameras arranged at a variety of angles looking upon a scene that's arranged as a tableau. The camera never moves behind the roughly 180-degree line along which all of the actors are placed. *The Leisure Hive*, however, cuts around much more, moving around circular spaces, letting the camera share the perspectives of individual characters, and doing things like having a shot of a character turning to look at something before cutting to what it is they're looking at. It's an altogether more dynamic style that makes a much more thorough and *Alien*-like use of space. It is in many ways an incremental change, and at this point the lack of any real improvement in the script keeps it from having too much impact, but it still marks a real and significant turning point in the series.

Like a Computer, But There's Something Wrong With It (*Meglos*)

It's September 27, 1980. The Police are at number one with "Don't Stand So Close To Me." It stays at number one for all four weeks of this story. Stevie Wonder, Queen, Diana Ross, Thin Lizzy, and Barbara Streisand also chart. Those who notice a tendency for the music charts to suddenly go a bit dull right when Doctor Who is having a rough time of it get further ammunition today.

While in real news, it's announced that *The Evening News* will be closing and merging with *The Evening Standard*, James Callaghan announces that he will resign as leader of the Labour Party, the Metro is released by British Leyland, and Margaret Thatcher gives her "The lady's not for turning" speech, in which she basically declares that she doesn't much care if her economic policies are disastrous, she's not going to change them. They are, and she doesn't.

And if none of that sounds terribly exciting, you should see what's on television, namely *Meglos*. To paraphrase an old joke, it's terribly boring, plus the episodes are too short. But all of this masks something approximating a sensible decision. *Meglos* is the second story of the John Nathan-Turner era to make it to screen, but it's actually the third story of the era to be made, coming after both *The Leisure Hive* and *State of Decay* in production. Notably, *State of Decay* features Adric, the new companion, meaning that *Meglos* marks an active decision to go back and create a fill-in story instead of jumping straight into the E-Space stories and Adric's introduction.

On the one hand this means that the Nathan-Turner era began, from a production perspective, with the three stories least like how it meant to carry on. Two were by and large Graham Williams stories with the serial numbers filed off, and the third is a script that got abandoned back in the Hinchcliffe era (through no fault of its own). But even given this, there is a sense of a deliberate effort to make a steady transition away from the Williams era and towards a new model. The second, subtler John Nathan-Turner revolution is rumbling along here. It's just that this is an excruciatingly rocky step along the way. Yes, *The Leisure Hive* was rocky too, but this is an out-and-out disaster.

First, then, why? Frankly, the answer here is "writers" again. It's almost entirely that simple. Certainly, and this doesn't get admitted enough, for all that the script is two steps backwards from the Williams era the production is at least one step forward. It's clear that the show is trying to do more than point cameras at Tom Baker and some other people and hope that entertainment will happen. That isn't anywhere near enough, but it's something. But my God, John Flanagan and Andrew McCulloch turn out an insipid script almost entirely lacking in characterization or depth. Bidmead's editing focuses more on getting the science right than on improving it. The result is horribly flat and still insipid.

Ah, yes. Bidmead. Christopher H. Bidmead is an interesting figure. There are some writers who come across much better and saner in interviews than they do in their scripts. Bidmead, on the other hand, falls into the opposite and usually much more interesting category. His three scripts for the program are all phenomenally good, but what he actually says about what he was trying to do with Doctor Who makes him come off as a bewildering hack of a writer who believed that the problems with Doctor Who were an excess of comedy and that it was too "magical." You can generally count on zero hands how often removing comedy and magic from Doctor Who is going to be a recipe for success.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about Bidmead's tenure is that he does such a wretched job of removing magic from the series. Even in this story the Dodecahedron gives the sense of being powerful because it's a Platonic solid as opposed to working on anything resembling an actual scientific principle. And in future stories, most obviously in Bidmead's own scripts, the sense that there might be some magical thinking underlying them becomes even more unavoidable.

By any standards the underlying ideas here are bonkers. And it's not just the Dodecahedron's reliance on Plato Power, either. Meglos's shape-changing abilities do not seem to come from any logical or scientific concept. He apparently needs to be merged with an Earthling to change shape, but why this is and why an Earthling instead of, for instance, a much nearer-by species is wholly unclear. And then there's the chronic hysteresis.

In practice, the chronic hysteresis is simply a time loop. But as time loops go it's one of the strangest we've seen. The Doctor and Romana escape it by mimicking their own actions out of sync with the loop, thus throwing the loop out of phase – in other words, they "trick" it. As Miles and Wood point out at great length, this is completely insane from any rational perspective. It's one of the most nonsensical time loops ever in the series. And perhaps most interestingly, it's overtly magical. It makes sense only if the time loop – and thus the universe itself – is not only aware but understands itself through the manipulation of symbols and language. Saying the right words tricks it. It is the exact inverse of everything that Bidmead ostensibly believes about the program.

Except that it actually does make sense. Bidmead, apparently, was responsible for renaming the loop a "chronic hysteresis." And those words are significant. "Chronic" is sensible enough – ongoing, continual, that's all sensible language for "caught in something for all eternity." But "hysteresis" is an odd word. What it specifically means is that there is a bit of lag between cause and effect in a system. It's not, in and of itself, the right word for a time loop *per se*. It has nothing to do with recursion or reiteration. But it just about makes sense as a description for this particular type of loop. After the initial set of repeated actions, the Doctor and Romana get a few seconds of awareness of what's happening before they repeat their actions again. There is, in other words, a period of lag in it. And a hysteresis would at least in some sense be meaningfully

interacted with by throwing it "out of phase," which is the term the Doctor uses – i.e. altering the nature of the gap.

What we're faced with, in other words, is something that overtly works like magic in the "manipulation of the universe through the manipulation of symbols" sense of the concept but that also clearly adheres to a set of fixed and consistent rules. Which is fair enough. Certainly "magic" isn't the most unreasonable shorthand ever for "when there are no rules governing what happens." And it appears that this is the sense Bidmead means by his "less magic" prescription for Doctor Who, that aspects of the story have to work according to fixed rules as opposed to arbitrarily. Thus, if the time loop is going to be broken in that way, the time loop has to be consistently conceptualized as something that can be broken in that way. By naming it a "chronic hysteresis" Bidmead does just that.

What's interesting about this is that it marks an explicit transition in the sorts of things that appear in Doctor Who stories. For much of Tom Baker's tenure, the Doctor has solved problems by inventing spurious branches of science and applying them to things. So, for instance, in *The Pirate Planet* he creates "a hyperspatial forceshield around the shrunken planets" before "invert[ing] the gravity field" of it. This is not even remotely meaningful. It's just arbitrary technobabble. It makes sense because it fills a gap in the plot usefully and sounds like a vaguely credible way for how the Doctor might have solved the problem he was facing at that particular moment in time.

But the chronic hysteresis is different. Instead of being a solution that fills a gap in the narrative, it's an object with a defined set of rules that the Doctor interacts with. In this regard it's much more like a "hard SF" sort of concept – a scientific idea that must be solved like a puzzle. Except that instead of working like science, it works symbolically, like language. It's important to stress that this isn't just a switch in the sorts of stories that are told. It's a distinct switch towards the unification of concept and event that we've been talking about for a while now. Instead of having dialogue that simply explains what happened, under Bidmead the show is trying to have its ideas dictate the way in which they are interacted with. This makes it much easier to engage in more visual storytelling, because the actions that the Doctor takes are ones that extend not from his cleverness but from the nature of the world he's in.

There are also some strong bits of the production of *Meglos*. After a rather crass and overbearing score by Peter Howell in *The Leisure Hive* we get a score that is at times genuinely effective. Dudley Simpson's scores get more of a bad reputation than they perhaps deserve, amounting usually to "bland and occasionally irritating wallpaper" as opposed to "sins against man and God," but the music in *Meglos* at times actually starts to make it clear why replacing Simpson wasn't just a case of shaking things up but rather a positive change. There are, in fact, moments where the music manages to make the Tigellan city actually seem mystical and wondrous. Which is impressive, because there's nothing else that contributes even remotely to that impression.

The other thing that's decent about *Meglos* is the acting, or at least, some of it. Much has been made by several people about Tom Baker's supposed lack of enthusiasm in this season. While it's true that over the course of the first few stories filmed he was apparently quite ill, which puts a visible damper on his performance, as Tat Wood puts it in one of the best sentences in all of *About Time*, Baker "is having fun finding ways of suggesting he's a mad cactus." It's known that Baker did not get along entirely well with Nathan-Turner and his attempts to rein in the star's more self-indulgent tendencies. But as with the cases where Pertwee was not entirely happy with things, Baker is in many ways improved by the curtailing of his freedom. Far from being off his game, he is, in this season, much closer to the character he was at the height of the Hinchcliffe era.

Credit also has to go to the "cactus Baker" makeup, photos of which are one of the more popular and common images from this era. The reasons are straightforward enough: it's a fantastic and unnerving image that turns the popularity of the actor and his character on its ear. It's what Bob Baker and Dave Martin were trying to get with having the Doctor be possessed in *The Invisible Enemy*, but done this time with a simpler and yet more dramatic physical transformation that lands much more squarely in the realm of "creepy."

And finally some mention must go to Jacqueline Hill, returning to the program after far too many years, this time playing Lexa, the religious zealot/secondary antagonist of the story. Given next to nothing to work with as far as her character goes, Hill, surprising absolutely no one who has ever seen any of her appearances as Barbara in the first two seasons of Doctor Who, nails it and is one of the strongest parts of the episode by far. She's as wasted in *Meglos* as she was in several parts of the Hartnell era, but carries off the same steady dignity that is so familiar from that era. She remains a direly under-appreciated actress who deserved a longer and more extravagantly prestigious career than she ever got. But it's marvelous to see her again.

Past that, however, there's not a lot to say about the story that's terribly interesting. It introduces another new piece of filming technology, a technique called Scene Sync that's basically CSO with camera movement. Its fourth episode may actually have fewer minutes of new footage than most of *The Mind Robber*. And now it's over, so we can move on to more interesting things. So there you go.

That's The Lion King (*Full Circle*)

It's October 25, 1980. Barbra Streisand is at number one with "Woman in Love," which lasts for three weeks before Blondie unseats her with "The Tide is High." David Bowie, Adam and the Ants, and The Police also chart, while Air Supply, Kate Bush, and XTC lurk about the lower reaches of the chart.

In real news, six IRA prisoners in Maze prison begin a hunger strike that lasts through December. El Salvador and Honduras resolve to put a border dispute to the International Court of Justice to decide. The border dispute stemmed from the 1969 "Football War," the first war to be directly caused by a football result. The Polish government reluctantly recognizes Solidarity, Jimmy Carter gets his ass kicked by Ronald Reagan, and Voyager I flies by Saturn.

While on television things begin to get interesting. Some people suggest that this is the true beginning of the John Nathan-Turner era. This claim, however, is based on the difficult to defend assertion that there is a singular John Nathan-Turner era. Nathan-Turner worked with four script editors, three of whom deserve to have eras named after them, and his tenure spans nine years. The idea that *The Leisure Hive* and *Survival* belong to the same era is nearly as absurd as suggesting that *An Unearthly Child* and *The Time Monster* do.

No, the Nathan-Turner era, inasmuch as such a creature can be said to exist at all, firmly began with *The Leisure Hive* and the ostentatious drive for change that it entailed. Nevertheless, there's clearly something that shifts here. The most superficial aspect of it is Adric, who I suppose I have to deal with. Like so much of the Nathan-Turner era, however, it is difficult to deal with Adric in the correct order. His first moment on screen is haunted by what's to come. A commenter way back on the blog version of the *Planet of the Spiders* essay observed that the story is far better when Jon Pertwee regenerates into a funny looking man with curly hair instead of into Tom Baker. A similar principle applies here. Knowing what becomes of Adric – namely that he becomes the first major companion to die – makes every moment he is on the screen resonate oddly and in a way it could not possibly have at the time.

Added to this is the problem of Matthew Waterhouse himself. It is difficult to find any creative figure associated with the show that fewer people have anything good to say about than Matthew Waterhouse. For years he was one of only two living leading actors on Doctor Who to have never reprised their roles (the other being Jackie Lane), and it was only in 2014 that he returned to the role for Big Finish. Numerous co-stars have been tremendously hostile towards him in interviews, and there are more than a few interviews on his part that dig the hole deeper. One ought to be fair – he was eighteen when he took the role. That I am not famous for the work I did and the gossip of people who knew me when I was eighteen is something I am eternally grateful for, and surely most people can say the same.

But we're putting lipstick on a pig here. The root of the problem is that Matthew Waterhouse was god-awful in the role of Adric. I mean, this is an era where even K-9 – a character expressly designed for younger children – was being used in more sophisticated and complex ways. In the next story the musical cues begin making metatextual jokes about K-9, whereas in this story his decapitated head is waved around by the Doctor as a fetishistic totem to ward off swamp creatures. It's the most interesting and complex use of the concept the series has seen to date (admittedly a low bar to clear). So when that is contrasted with Matthew Waterhouse's performance of Adric, an overly emotive mess consisting of no successfully communicated emotions other than petulance and vanity, it is very, very hard to come up with anything good to say about the character.

It's tempting to try to build this out into a larger critique of John Nathan-Turner's casting, but the fact of the matter is that Waterhouse is no more offensive than the children in *The Horns of Nimon* or any number of other unfortunate moments in Graham Williams's casting of the series. Graham Williams avoided ever making this bad a casting decision in the leads, but given that Williams only cast leads twice (plus two K-9s, only one of whom can even be argued to be flawed) that's hardly vicious. John Nathan-Turner oversaw the casting of nine more leads in his time on Doctor Who, and while one or two can be quibbled with he never botched another quite this badly. (Casting was never the main problem with Colin Baker, and Bonnie Langford has her charm.) Yes, his guest actor policy occasionally led to some questionable decisions, but the fact of the matter is that Waterhouse was no worse than plenty of what came before, and the casting improved dramatically over time. The only thing that really hurts is that he's a regular.

It's easier to build a critique of Adric's high-concept nature. And certainly there's a problem there – the boy genius is a character type that almost never works. But even there, companions have been in high-concept mode since Leela. Sarah Jane was the last "generic female assistant" companion for nearly a decade. Leela and Romana were both high concept, and everyone else in the classic series save Peri is as well. But at least in this critique there's a grain of truth. Certainly it's unmistakable that Nathan-Turner oversaw a shift in the series where it became more high concept than it had ever been. Increasingly many stories had blockbuster taglines and single catchy concepts (often, in the problematic middle years, "the return of X," usually regardless of whether or not X was something anyone gave a crap about).

The question is whether or not that's a bad thing. "High concept" is an epithet among the highbrow, but given that we've spent years here taking Doctor Who very, very seriously, any claim we might have to highbrow values is probably shot to hell. So let's take it for what it is. The tag "high concept," when used derisively, just means that the work is easily summed up in a single sentence. This is not actually entirely appropriate for *Full Circle*. While its idea – a planet with three species that turn out to be different forms of one species, one

of which holds the delusional belief that it's actually a species of alien colonists – is relatively simple, it lacks the movie poster punch of something like *Alien*.

A better definition of high concept is one we've been using for a while without attaching it to that phrase, which is a mode of storytelling in which every aspect of technique is pointing in the same direction. A high-concept film, in this definition, is not merely one that has a simple premise, but one where every creative decision is made to promote and advance a single aesthetic goal.

This is much harder to criticize. Superficially, and *About Time* hints at this objection, it seems to mark a rejection of the multiple simultaneous audiences that characterized the Williams era. But closer observation of *Full Circle* shows that this doesn't hold. There are clear components of the story that are designed for different audience segments, with children expected to like the Outsiders, teens expected to enjoy the science bits, and adults given some human drama anchored by the unsurprisingly fabulous George Baker. What's different is not the multiple modes of reception, but rather what they're supposed to do. The Williams era often held to a model akin to that of the Adam West *Batman* series, where a younger audience was expected to take it seriously while an older audience knew enough to laugh at it. But here, even though the show is working for multiple simultaneous audiences, every part of the audience is expected to get more or less the same aesthetic result out of it. It's using different approaches to get to the same end as opposed to working towards multiple ends.

This gets us towards the other way in which *Full Circle* marks a concrete turning point in Doctor Who. It is, if nothing else, the beginning of the Bidmead era. But as with everything else about this story we're forced to hedge and qualify a little. For one thing, the shuffled production order complicates this. The production order actually goes *State of Decay-Meglos-Full Circle*. And over those three stories you can see Bidmead successfully developing a distinct style and launching it in a very concrete and sensible way. But it's worth observing exactly how he does this. With *State of Decay* he applies his style to what was, in most regards, a Hinchcliffe-era script. With *Meglos,* he applies it to a story fully in the Williams style (whereas with *The Leisure Hive* he flailed around desperately trying to "fix" a Williams script).

This script, then, is the culmination of that process. Andrew Smith is in many ways the first modern Doctor Who writer. Tat Wood argues in the sixth volume of *About Time* that the writers of the Cartmel era were all working from a folk memory of what the series was, and credits this with the turnaround of the show in those years. What is significant about this is that it means the writers of that era were all on some level fans of the show – they were not just writing stories for Doctor Who but were writing from a concrete and lived experience of what Doctor Who stories were. Certainly that characterizes every script written for the new series, and it's unimaginable that there will ever be many, if any at all, scripts in the future that are not written by people who are writing Doctor Who based in part on a memory of watching it.

But Andrew Smith is the first writer for which this is true. And so we get

something interesting. Again, Miles and Wood come close to observing this by noting how the script incorporates stock elements of Terrance Dicks, Robert Holmes, and Malcolm Hulke scripts. But what they don't quite nail down precisely is the consequence of all of this. This is the first time that Doctor Who has done a story that is, at its core, the distilled essence of everything that had previously made Doctor Who good. Sure, it's done ultra-traditional stories before – most obviously *Planet of the Spiders*, which is unrepentantly a greatest hits reel of the Pertwee era. But those were retrospectives of a single era. This is a retrospective of, in many ways, the entire show. It contains bits of everything that the show did frequently enough to become a trope.

But crucially, it doesn't do them out of a sense of nostalgia or cynicism. Smith is changing things around. The tropes aren't used for their own sake but because Smith is so steeped in Doctor Who that its tropes are completely instinctive to him. So when you get the foolish and bureaucratic old men who are lying to the entire population – a vintage Dicks/Holmes concept – that's immediately undercut when you find out that they're only lying because they've lost the manual to their spaceship and can't fly it. The conflict between the people and those in charge, which previously would have been the plot of an entire story – indeed, for the next story it is the entire plot – is here just shorthand to get at a different story entirely, one that, notably, also comes straight out of Robert Holmes.

On top of this, there's a sense of seriousness and drama to it. With a script that's just got its head down and is doing its work there are opportunities for depth of acting that have been missing. Tom Baker, for all that is said about how miserable he was on the program and how unpleasant he was, is once again on form in a way he hasn't been since Season Fourteen. When he gets angry here there's a palpable depth to his rage that is new. And the death of the Marsh Child is played so straight it's devastatingly effective.

Unfortunately it's a while before this sheer and easy comfort with the past of the show becomes standard issue. Smith, for whatever reason, never pens another script, and as I said it's not really until the Cartmel era that writers working from an instinctive understanding of what Doctor Who is become the norm. But whatever other weaknesses the script has – and there certainly are a fair few – the fact that the script is so comfortable with being Doctor Who is a major advantage that lets Bidmead, in his edits of it, really shine and do what he's trying to do.

Which brings us back to the strange paradox of Christopher Bidmead: despite being the most openly pro-science and anti-magic script editor Doctor Who has ever had, he ends up overseeing some of the most magic-filled stories in Doctor Who. On the one hand this is ostensibly a story about evolution that's meant to teach all the little boys and girls of the United Kingdom how that works. On the other, it has next to no understanding of how evolution actually does work, or what timeframe it works over, postulating a bizarre system in which spiders, humans, and The Creature from the Black Lagoon are all

meaningfully the same species.

Miles and Wood indulge in a long and relatively fun essay entitled "How Does Evolution Work" on this point, suggesting various scientific models that could rescue evolution in Doctor Who from its obvious scientific difficulties (most obviously the fact that virtually every intelligent life form in the universe visually resembles British character actors), but the essay is firmly a case of trying to find a diegetic solution to a non-diegetic problem. Any in-universe explanation for the phenomenon is really just window dressing for the obvious answer that every intelligent life form in the universe is being portrayed by British character actors.

But what's key to understand is that the non-diegetic answer is, in most regards, the superior one. I mean, if you actually want to understand Doctor Who, the fact of the matter is that what is going on is not primarily based on some elaborate in-universe explanation about the origins of life. It's based on the fact that the show is being made in England. We're back, in other words, to the old anti-realist argument about how art is generally better understood as a constructed aesthetic experience than it is as gossip about imaginary people.

But this is what is so interesting about Bidmead. For all of his pro-rationalist leanings, he is ruthless about subjecting science to the larger concerns of narrative. What we noticed in *Meglos* about the chronic hysteresis only becomes more extreme here. Alzarius is a planet where the laws of evolution serve the plot of the story in an unabashed manner. The three species we see are all differing forms of one another despite the improbability of that. The story is set in a moment where the evolutionary turmoil of the planet is coming to a head. Everything, in other words, is actively geared towards the matter of telling this specific story. The story may be, on one level, a primer on evolution, but it's a primer where every aspect of evolution is subject to a larger narrative goal.

The so-called E-Space Trilogy, consisting of this and the next two stories, then, is where Bidmead shows what he can do. These are the three stories in which his vision of what Doctor Who can be improves existing models of Doctor Who. From a production standpoint, he moves through the previous two versions of Doctor Who – the Hinchcliffe and Williams eras – and in each case attempts an improvement in which his approach expands on the potential of the previous models. And now, having completed those, he finishes with this, a script that takes the best of the entirety of Doctor Who. And over it he lays his scientific-minded approach, showing how the intersections of real scientific ideas with narrative structures can tell increasingly interesting stories.

And it works. By grounding the fantastic in the high-mindedly real, Bidmead manages to construct a model of Doctor Who that is fascinating – one that merges the high-concept visuality that Nathan-Turner is demanding with not just strong narrative but the very essence of Doctor Who. For all its flaws – and to be fair, most of them are Adric – this story is a shot across the bow that suggests a new vision of what Doctor Who can be. Now Bidmead just needs to show that he can carry on with these sorts of high-wire acts.

Fish from Space (*State of Decay*)

It's November 22nd, 1980. Blondie remains at number one with "The Tide is High." A week later ABBA take over the spot with "Super Trouper," their last number one hit on the UK charts. It remains at number one for the remainder of the story. The Police, The Boomtown Rats, Kool and the Gang, UB40, and John Lennon also chart. Meanwhile, Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Clash, and Devo lurk about in the lower portions of the charts, the latter's "Whip It" peaking in the 50s, which is probably considerably lower than most people would guess if pressed.

In real news, we should probably start with the murder of John Lennon five days before the last episode of this story, which, a week later, causes his then declining single "(Just Like) Starting Over" to suddenly jump from twenty-two to number one and prompting a hurried re-release of "Imagine." Because for anti-capitalist pacifist legends, John Lennon and Yoko Ono were nothing if not shrewd businesspeople. A massive earthquake kills nearly five thousand in southern Italy. And Jean Donovan, an American missionary, is murdered in El Salvador along with three Catholic nuns.

While on television, it's 1977. Those who enjoy the ways in which the musical charts and Doctor Who oddly parallel will be bemused that 1977 was by most standards the peak of ABBA's popularity, and that the last time ABBA was at number one was during *The Invasion of Time*, the final story of a season that was meant to begin with *The Vampire Mutations* by Terrance Dicks. Unfortunately the BBC was busy doing a high-profile adaptation of *Dracula* at the time and Head of Serials Graeme MacDonald commenced the first of a long series of conflicts with Graham Williams by ordering the script spiked for fear that Doctor Who would be seen as "sending up" the BBC's more serious adaptation, which resulted in Dicks writing *Horror of Fang Rock* instead.

Then came Bidmead, who as we've seen had a distinctly different take on what the program should be than his predecessor. Bidmead viewed Doctor Who as a more or less straight drama, whereas Adams, though not the cavalier jokester his detractors portray him as being, clearly preferred a mixture of comedy and drama. Beyond that, Bidmead employed structures where real scientific concepts were transformed and expanded into the fantastic, while Adams worked with stock sci-fi ideas that didn't need explanation. The result was that Bidmead saw little value in anything Adams had commissioned save for Christopher Priest's *Sealed Orders*, which didn't quite work out due in part to Romana needing to be removed from it. (Bidmead did commission another script from Priest, but that one fell afoul of Eric Saward, creating one of the great "what might have beens" of Doctor Who's history.) The best option he could find, then, was to go way back into the program's archives and dust off *The Vampire Mutations*.

As a result we have a script that was made for 1977 in the aesthetic of the Hinchcliffe era now being made in 1980. This turns into a study of contrasts. The nearest equivalent story in the program's history is *The Brain of Morbius* – another Terrance Dicks adaptation/spoof of a classic British horror story, although Holmes's script for *The Pyramids of Mars* is also an obvious antecedent, as is *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*. We are, in other words, back in the model of the literary homage, where the Doctor is unleashed inside someone else's story to jockey for supremacy.

In the old model – even in the "serious" days of the Hinchcliffe era – this was done in part with a bit of humor. But Bidmead's drive towards drama has stripped much of that away. Even still, the Doctor is funnier in this story than he has been all season (or, if you want to think about it in terms of production order, his humor wasn't done being stripped away). But this is something you can't just turn back the clock on. Three years of Graham Williams focusing primarily on the Doctor and his charismatic charm makes it impossible to go back to the lower key humor of the Hinchcliffe era. It's dialed back here, but in an odd way – his clowning is still broad and excessive, just considerably rarer. The result is a script in which the Doctor is mostly serious but for a quick bit of physical comedy with Romana and a deliberately parodic bit rousing the villagers into an opposition army against the vampires.

But this really does pose a problem for the Hinchcliffe approach. With the exception of the extremely serious *Pyramids of Mars*, the Hinchcliffe era's horror pastiches were mostly quite funny. *The Brain of Morbius*, after all, had a suicidal vegetable envier as its great galactic conqueror. And the seriousness of *Pyramids of Mars* is hard to read as a virtue – when examined alongside the rest of its era, it, like *The Seeds of Doom*, comes across as fast-paced and brutal because of a lack of other ideas, not because of an aesthetic commitment to gripping action-packed drama. So by stripping the impish and mercurial qualities out of the approach Bidmead sets himself up with a real problem: how do you make the story work in 1980?

Further complicating things is the fact that Bidmead's usual approach faces a real challenge here. At his best Bidmead creates the fantastic out of the real, through playful expansions upon existing concepts. In *Full Circle* he took the basic idea of evolution and created a world from the literary application of it. In time, when he starts contributing his own scripts, he'll build worlds and universes out of concepts from mathematics and computer science. But there's no real way to make hard scientific concepts out of vampires. Fundamentally, they stem from literature and stories, and that's not a direction Bidmead is eager to traverse.

Under normal circumstances this would be a recipe for disaster. I mean, occasionally you get gold when the scriptwriter and script editor are pulling in different directions; normally, you get a muddled train wreck of conflicting ideas and men in very bad lizard costumes. But this is Terrance Dicks. That's not a knock on David Fisher, who's a fine scriptwriter, but Terrance Dicks is, god

bless him, the most magnificently efficient hack on the planet. And I use "hack" here not in a pejorative sense at all. This has always been the gift of Terrance Dicks – he can write well even when he has no desire to be writing what he's writing. I mean, nobody seriously believes he enjoyed every Target novelization he wrote, do they? No. Dicks is the ultimate "lock himself in his flat for a weekend and bang the fucking thing out" writer, and there's not a set of circumstances on the planet that is going to get him to turn out half-assed work. Or, rather, his half-assed work is barely distinguishable from his top notch work. Even if his heights of genius are lower than those of Robert Holmes – or those of Christopher Bidmead, for that matter – Terrance Dicks's worst case scenario is still leagues above most people's best day at the office.

But in this case there's an assist from an odd direction. What ends up happening is that the vampires are explained in terms of ancient Time Lord legend. And this, in turn, hits upon an odd transition in the nature of the Time Lords. There are, in the classic series, essentially three visions of the Time Lords. Two have shown up so far – Terrance Dicks's and Robert Holmes's. (The third, of course, is Andrew Cartmel's.) The Dicks version is the one we see starting in The War Games and extending through the Pertwee era. The Holmes version begins with *Genesis of the Daleks* and lasts until *The Deadly Assassin*. But then comes the odd decade or so between *The Deadly Assassin* and *Remembrance of the Daleks* in which both Dicks and Holmes weigh in on the Time Lords, as do several lesser writers, all with no real coherence or mutual plan.

For the most part Terrance Dicks "wins" this debate by outliving Holmes, writing most of the novelizations featuring the Time Lords and then writing several books in the 90s and early 00s with Time Lords such that he basically got to spin out his vision at great length, whereas Holmes's vision lurks around under the surface of Dicks's, never quite becoming clear. (A prime example is Dicks's obsession with the CIA.) The usual statement of this – coming in part from Jan Rudzki's legendary screed about *The Deadly Assassin* – is that Dicks's Time Lords are powerful technocrats whereas Holmes's are petty squabblers. But this is wrong. Dicks's Time Lords are just as prone to factional squabbling as Holmes's – *The Three Doctors* is full of bickering.

No, the difference is rather one of attitude. Dicks's Time Lords are detached and above the fray whereas Holmes's Time Lords are historically bound. I am not going to rehash the argument made in *The Deadly Assassin*, in no small part because it was fifteen thousand words long, but the conclusion was that Holmes's Time Lords functioned as creatures who still interacted with the universe through memory and imagination whereas Dicks's Time Lords austerely looked down on the universe from a position of superiority. (Another way of putting this is that Dicks's Time Lords were similar to the Black and White Guardians.) Holmes's Time Lords, in other words, are mysterious even to themselves, lords of something they do not fully understand. (It is, as ever, a gorgeous bit of cynicism on Holmes's part – after all, what lord ever understands those who are ruled over?)

This marks the first time since *The Deadly Assassin* that Dicks has gotten to return to his creations in a meaningful sense. While none but the Doctor and Romana appear, the nature of Time Lords is central to the story. The plot hinges on the existence of an ancient war between the Time Lords and the vampires, and speculates that vampire legends on all planets come from some ancient memory of this conflict. On one level this is just your usual von Dänikenism – oh look, human legends of vampires are really just legends of aliens. But there's something underpinning it that is new. Past stories have usually contented themselves to explain aspects of human mythology in terms of aliens. But here the script asserts that vampire legends exist across species. I have not exhaustively checked this next claim, and so may turn out to be wrong, but I believe this is the first time that the von Däniken trick has been applied on a universe-wide level instead of on a planet-wide level. (The closest I can think of is the end of *Underworld*, which suggests that the Greek myth was in fact a prophecy of future.) And because we're so familiar with the von Däniken trick it's easy to miss the radical element of this, namely that narrative principles are quietly revealed to be fundamental principles of the universe. There is such a thing as a universal narrative.

Once again we have that characteristically odd double gesture of the Bidmead era – and Miles and Wood pick up on this at length with their essay on this story, in which they argue that Doctor Who could well be fantasy and not science fiction. Yes, vampires turn out to be ancient aliens with scientific explanations and they're only able to maintain their power by keeping the people from reading or learning – knowledge is forbidden and the chief vampire is actually a scientist. But there are two things that undercut this. First, of course, is the suggestion that vampires are real at all. Even if they're "really just" aliens, they are real and work like we expect them to.

But second and more significantly, everything about the vampires is still grounded in a sense of the ancient and the unknown. Look at the Record of Rassilon itself – an obscure directive buried in an ancient museum piece of technology that is old and obsolete even by the standards of the TARDIS. It's not a fancy record in the databanks but a set of weathered punch cards. Even though there was some logic and sense to the Time Lord/Vampire war when it happened, it's clear that the very sense of it is lost and that it has been forgotten.

The result is on one level a swipe at the Holmesian Time Lords – a suggestion that they're just fallen Dicksian Time Lords who have forgotten too much and are now bumbling around in a universe they'd understand if they only stopped and read up on it. But this misunderstands how the ancient and unknown function in this story. They are not merely mysteries to clear up. Defeating the vampires overtly requires relics, artifacts of the unknown and ancient. The Record of Rassilon, old and arcane as it is, is essential to defeating the vampires. The power of the ancient, in other words, is not merely that it's scary because we've forgotten how to understand it. There is real power to ancient artifacts in this story.

And so the austere autocracy of Dicks's Time Lords is preserved even within the memory and imagination-bounded vision of Holmes's Time Lords. Dicks makes mastery over myth and legend a part of the Time Lord's technocratic superiority. But in the course of doing so he also solves Bidmead's problem for him. The vampires are simultaneously able to be literary creatures and scientific creatures because they are based on the lost science of the ancient Time Lords. This science flickers between rationalism and a literary approach, with the gap between Holmes and Dicks's conceptions of Time Lords serving also as the point of ambiguity that allows for an ambiguous relationship between science and fantasy.

And so through this story Bidmead is able to demonstrate how his approach can subsume the approach of the Hinchcliffe-era. *Dracula* can fuse with the Doctor because Bidmead's conception of the scientific is based on the odd fusion of the scientific with the literary. What happens when *Dracula* is merged with Doctor Who isn't just some highbrow literary jokes or some recycled thrills from popular movies (though the script has a couple of each) – no, *Dracula* is moved out of the familiar conceptual space of a cliché and into a strangely ambiguous conceptual space that bridges reality and imagination.

There are, of course, downsides. Simply put, the production team is not a production team that does these stories with the instinctive skill that the Hinchcliffe era could. Baker, who was for this story both ill and feuding with his co-stars as well as with the production team, is still phenomenal in the part, but the combination doesn't lend itself instinctively to a seamless execution. Peter Moffatt begins a lengthy career of idiosyncratic Doctor Who directing with things like the questionable decision to have Aukon, Camilla, and Zargo deliver large swaths of dialogue standing in a tableau and staring at the camera, and it is very, very hard not to laugh when Zargo begins pulling evil vampire faces in the backgrounds of these shots. The result is either a full-throated embrace of over-acted lunacy that outdoes the Graham Williams era in its skill at this sort of joke, or just bewilderingly ill-advised. (The former is a real possibility, though – look at the joke musical cue K-9 gets when exiting the TARDIS in Episode Four, as if to comment that he's woefully unimpressive. This is not the last time we will be left to stare incredulously at the screen trying to figure out if Moffatt is just messing with us. Nor, for that matter, is he the last person with that name we'll be doing that with.)

This begins a frustrating tendency of the John Nathan-Turner era, which is that it frequently reaches for doing things the series did in the past only to fall short in the execution in some key ways. Nathan-Turner's usual defense of this was the catchphrase "the memory cheats," and there's at least some truth to it. For all that is wrong with this story – and there are a fair number of things wrong with this story – there's quite a bit that's better done, and it still holds to the general truism that the quality of television improves constantly. The costumes and sets for the tower are fabulous, the sorts of things that *The Brain of Morbius* would have killed for. The action sequences are tighter than they've been

in ages. Though there are some appalling special effects, the use of fades and video overlays adds new ways of storytelling to the show's repertoire. And the music is an improvement on Dudley Simpson.

All of which makes it so infuriating that Aukon, Zargo, and Camilla are only occasionally even tolerable, that the peasants look like they came out of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and that nobody can be bothered to cut together a decent horror sequence in a story about vampires. Yes, the memory cheats in thinking that you could just run *Pyramids of Mar*s as-is on BBC1 in 1980 and have it look good, but the fact of the matter is that if you watch the stories back-to-back there are obviously some basic technical things that *Pyramids of Mars* gets right and *State of Decay* doesn't. And this keeps being true of the Nathan-Turner era. With maddening frequency it soars on advanced topics in television production while it crashes and burns on the basics.

But past that, we still have something interesting here. For three stories now Bidmead has been showing off a new approach for Doctor Who in terms of what came before and how it can genuinely improve what Doctor Who is. Now it's time for what we might call the pure Bidmead era. The first half of the Bidmead era sketches out a vision of the show in terms of things we've seen before. Now come four stories that are unlike anything we have ever seen before or since. For sixteen episodes, Doctor Who is going to become one of the most distinctive pieces of science fiction in Great Britain at the time. In fact, I'd say the most distinctive piece if it weren't for the fact that in another medium entirely an even bigger revolution was already well underway...

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (*2000 AD*)

There are, of course, many ways in which British culture has jumped over and influenced American culture. But the 1980s British Invasion in the comics industry remains one that's easy to miss the significance of, in part because its three leading lights – Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, and Neil Gaiman – have largely sucked the oxygen from the event, obscuring the fact that for a significant period of time the overwhelming majority of significant comics writers and artists in the US were, in fact, British. Consider the following list: Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman, Garth Ennis, Peter Milligan, Jamie Delano, Andy Diggle, Mike Carey, Andrew Cartmel, Paul Cornell, Al Ewing, Mark Millar, Lawrence Miles, Warren Ellis, Tony Lee, Alan Davis, Barry Kitson, Dave Gibbons, Glen Fabry, Kevin O'Neil, Bryan Talbot, Gary Erskine, Frank Quitely, Trevor Hairsine, Sam Kieth, John McRea, Frazer Irvine, Brian Bolland, Garry Leach, Steve Yeowell, Steve Dillon, John Ridgway, Carlos Ezquerra, Pat Mills, John Wagner, Jock, John Bolton, Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning, and Mark Buckingham. Aside from one or two Doctor Who names I threw in there because this is after all a Doctor Who book, these are some of the biggest names in comics, whether because they are or at some point were superstars or because they were on one or two massively famous projects. But more significantly, everyone on that list has published at least one thing in either *2000 AD* or its spinoff, *Judge Dredd Megazine*. And for the majority of them that was some of their earliest professional work.

So if you want to suggest that *2000 AD* is one of the most important British science fiction publications ever, period, you're not exactly short on ammunition for your case. On the other hand, generally speaking, if you want to argue that it was one of the best... well, now you're in a bit of a harder situation. Because as vital as *2000 AD* was and at times still is, it's not exactly... good.

First some background. In late 1975 an editor at IPC Magazines got an inkling that science fiction might hit it big soon and hired Pat Mills to develop a comic book in that vein. Pat Mills had overseen two previous comics aimed at the same age group – *Battle Picture Weekly* and the infamous *Action*, which was sufficiently violent and blood-soaked as to suffer a familiar fate as Doctor Who: pissing off Mary Whitehouse and getting tragically neutered. *2000 AD* was a stunning execution of the basic formula of those two magazines, which displayed a satirical, anti-authoritarian streak mixed with a cheeky commitment to perversity. There were five strips in its first issue – sorry, prog, as the *2000 AD* terminology goes – *Invasion, Dan Dare, Harlem Heroes, Flesh*, and *M.A.C.H. 1*. Almost all of them are gloriously and tastelessly violent; only *Dan Dare*, reimagined as a more properly "futuristic" strip, displays even a glimmer of basic

taste. *Harlem Heroes* is about a sport that combines "football, boxing, kung fu, and basketball," while *M.A.C.H. 1* was an ultraviolent *Six Million Dollar Man* ripoff. *Invasion* was about working class British men violently resisting Soviet... sorry, Volgan occupation. And *Flesh*, perhaps the greatest of all of them, was about time-traveling dinosaur farmers and a particularly murderous T-Rex.

That said, the basic aesthetic of *2000 AD* is perhaps better summarized by the strip that replaced *Flesh* – a sixteen-issue job that is rarely mentioned as one of the absolute classics of *2000 AD,* despite being absolutely fantastic in every regard. I am speaking, of course, of *Shako*. *Shako* tells the story of a particularly homicidal polar bear who has swallowed some vital military hardware and is being chased by government agents. It is, in practice, nothing more than sixteen short strips of a polar bear violently slaughtering people in improbable and needlessly imaginative ways. Though really, little needs to be said about *Shako* beyond its tagline: "Shako! The Only Bear on the CIA Death List!" This, in a nutshell, is what *2000 AD* was: a comics magazine of completely and utterly insane premises that was willing to execute those premises with a reckless and manic glee well captured by its fictional editor/overlord, Tharg – a futuristic galactic conqueror turned British comics editor who excitedly praised the comic's "thrill power" with a gusto that would make John Nathan-Turner blush if not for the fact that Tharg would surely vaporize him on sight for entertainingly specious reasons.

But the real heart of *2000 AD* is *Judge Dredd*. Originally intended to launch in prog one, Dredd was held back a prog due to being not quite ready at the time. But he quickly and understandably became the magazine's signature feature. On a superficial level *Judge Dredd* is much like all of the other *2000 AD* strips. Dredd is a police officer in a futuristic city who is also authorized to dispense justice on the spot and who is a complete authoritarian hardass who thus solves every problem imaginable by shooting it, sometimes repeatedly. But what's interesting about *Judge Dredd* is that underneath the extravagant violence is a rather wicked bit of intelligent satire. The entire premise of it rapidly becomes that the audience is rooting for a character who is obviously a bad guy, while the villains are often perfectly sympathetic characters. In the first major storyline, Dredd violently puts down a rebellion of robots who are shown to have free will, and who are rebelling against conditions that are clearly slavery – a rebellion that would, in any normal sci-fi story, treat them as the good guys.

This move underlies much of what appeals about *2000 AD*. In its earliest days what is compelling about it is its stark anti-authoritarian streak. A character like Bill Savage, the protagonist of *Invasion*, was a classic anti-authoritarian tough guy who defied the rules and saved the day. Even in a strip without such an overtly rebellious lead, though, there's an ostentatious brashness to *2000 AD*. A strip like *Shako* is so needlessly violent and so cavalier with its plotting it appears to be deliberate. There's the sense, in other words, that *2000 AD* is just trying to piss off Mary Whitehouse so it can laugh in her face afterwards. This, at least, is fun, and is what leads to the usual description of *2000 AD* having a "punk"

sensibility. And notably, thus far, the most *2000 AD*-style story that Doctor Who has televised is probably *The Sun Makers*, a story we suggested was the show's most punk moment.

But as ever, punk's real apotheosis is its destruction and replacement with post-punk. We saw it in Doctor Who, and *2000 AD* is no different. *2000 AD*'s pure punk phase lasted one prog. Prog 2, with the introduction of *Judge Dredd*, moved on immediately to the post-punk phase in which the anti-authoritarian streak was applied to the ultimate establishment figure. Judge Dredd was a punk who not only worked for The Man, he was the living embodiment of The Man's power. He's the punk antihero who hasn't so much sold out as existed from the first moment on the side of established power. And the tension implicit in this is simply allowed to stand. Dredd simultaneously embodies a punk sensibility and a biting critique of the impotent silliness of grown men acting like angry children.

This is the essential genius of a lot of *2000 AD*: its awareness of its own excessiveness and its tendency to undercut it. But *Judge Dredd*, with its absurdly over-the-top settings (Mega City One was explicitly cited by Russell T. Davies as the inspiration for New New York in *Gridlock*) and active willingness to play with the unsympathetic nature of its protagonist (one of its best-regarded story arcs is about Dredd violently putting down pro-democracy protesters), pushes this approach to a different level. The undercutting in *Judge Dredd* isn't just a matter of the comic being ostentatiously over the top but a matter of active self-critique. *Judge Dredd* is continually calling into question its own pleasurability. It defies the reader to enjoy it even as it wallows in its excess.

It's a good trick, and one that *2000 AD* mirrored in a number of other classic strips – *Rogue Trooper, Strontium Dog, Nemesis the Warlock*, and *Sláine* all follow the basic approach of juxtaposing excessive and over-the-top violence with a sort of aggressively materialist and cynical view of the world that subjects that view to active critique. But as I said, it's not quite good. Its schlocky, willfully trashy sensibility makes it difficult to suggest that it's high art, and it's certainly not aiming for that description. And as clever as the *Judge Dredd* approach is, it's not a trick upon which you build an entire takeover of another country's comic book industry.

For that we need Alan Moore. To be fair, in my worldview we always need Alan Moore. I spent a while trying to figure out how many different Alan Moore entries to do over the course of *TARDIS Eruditorum* before realizing that the correct answer was "write *The Last War in Albion*," which is a *TARDIS Eruditorum*-sized project in its own right. Which is not to say that Alan Moore won't be showing up a few times in *TARDIS Eruditorum*, but that we'll be offering the abridged version here.

Alan Moore is, at the end of the day, the most important of the British Invasion comics writers. Yes, Neil Gaiman surpasses him in raw popularity, but Gaiman broke in largely because he could imitate Alan Moore reasonably well. Sure, his style has improved since then, but he still started as an Alan Moore clone. Grant Morrison would desperately like to be the most important of the

British Invasion comics writers, but… no, let's leave that for *Last War in Albion*. For our purposes, it's sufficient to say that at the end of the day Alan Moore is the one with the most influence. He's the one who ultimately defines his era. You can tell, because he displays the trait that defines the truly influential – he has a host of imitations, and no two of them seem able to agree on what it is that defines his style. And while *2000 AD* is not the start of Alan Moore's career, it's pretty darn early in that career. Which means that this is where we ought to square away what makes Alan Moore so distinctive and influential.

The overwhelming majority of Alan Moore's *2000 AD* work consists of short pieces that are only a few pages long. He has three longer pieces – the *E.T.* knockoff *Skizz,* the unfinished epic *The Ballad of Halo Jones*, and the *D.R. and Quinch* strips. And the latter of those are still fairly short – a series of humor pieces where no story lasted more than five installments or so. Everything else consisted of short four-page stories in the recurring series of *Tharg's Future Shocks* or *Time Twisters*.

Given the extent to which Moore is known for a sort of perverse verbosity (he's been cackling madly in several interviews lately about how his new novel is longer than the Bible and how he hopes people will call it the Really Good Book) this sort of ultra-short format is an interesting place to watch him work, particularly so early in his career before he'd really settled into a firm style or voice. One can see what really made Alan Moore stand out, even at the start of his career, from everyone else around him.

The first thing is the one that is most superficially obvious about Moore, which is that he's an exceedingly intelligent man. His knowledge of and ability to pastiche genres is startlingly vast, and while it's not until the denser and more sprawling work of the 1990s that this tendency really starts to emerge, the *Future Shocks* give him plenty of opportunities to show off his broad mastery of genres. He's also deft at coming up with clever solutions and ideas – few of his stories lack at least one neat or surprising twist somewhere in the story.

He is also an arch-formalist. More so than almost any other comics writer, Moore has spent an astonishing amount of time thinking about the mechanics of the medium and how to use them to tell stories. This isn't as clear in *2000 AD*, where the constraints of the format naturally limit what he can do, but even in this early work, particularly in his *Time Twisters* stories, there are moments where you can see the beginnings of his later arch-formalism.

This sort of cleverness is always a sound approach, although of Moore's strengths it is also the one that most lends itself to cynical readings – that he favors style over substance. And, if we're being fully open about it, we should note that Steven Moffat, with his tendency to have the resolutions of episodes hinge on things like wordplay based on phone lock screens, suffers/enjoys the same sort of popularity based on cleverness. One can raise the same complaint about Douglas Adams, if one really wants to. In short, Moore, Adams, and Moffat are all popular for roughly the same reason – they're very clever in ways that make the audience feel clever for keeping up with or appreciating them. It

works, but in and of itself it's not enough.

But there's a second trick Moore has up his sleeve, and it's both the one that really defines him as a comics writer and that is far, far less often imitated. Moore is unmatched in his ability to get at the emotional content of a fantastic scenario. Even in a relatively early and unremarkable story like 1980's "The Dating Game" he manages to take a drab old "the city's computer has gone mad and is doing terrible things to people" scenario and spin it into a kind of creepily poignant yarn about a computer that has fallen in love with a man and has started to stalk him before going a bit *Fatal Attraction* on him.

But Moore's real strength was in pieces like "The Reversible Man," a four-page version of the simple premise of narrating a human life completely backwards, in which he wrings delightfully ironic pathos out of moments like coming back from a funeral to meet his mother in the hospital for the first time. (Her condition gradually improves and she moves in with him and his wife.) But even on a smaller level, Moore is meticulous about having emotional motivations for characters. Even in a humorous piece like "The Wages of Sin" he builds his parodic treatment of stereotypical intergalactic conqueror villains around a washed-up repairman in the fading Veeblefetzer market.

For all that I adore the arcs of his philosophy and his inventiveness, this, in the end, is the real core of why Alan Moore was and is such a successful writer. He is phenomenally good at finding ways to use high-concept science fiction and fantasy as a way into stories about everyday emotional experiences. He's not the first writer to do so, but he's very good at it, and his capacity to wed that to a sort of manic inventiveness and formal bravado propelled him to the top of his field.

And this, in turn, explains the other real revolution that took place within *2000 AD* and its descendants. Even *Judge Dredd* benefited concretely from this approach, eventually and in Moore's wake, telling stories where the over-the-top antics of Mega City One got used as the backdrop for remarkably affecting stories about the city's inhabitants, often treating Dredd himself as a force of nature haunting the city instead of as a character. It wasn't just a new type of comics storytelling, it was in many ways a new type of popular science fiction storytelling – one where the later influence on people like Joss Whedon and, let's be honest here, Russell T Davies is obvious.

And so while large swaths of *2000 AD* are sophomoric and blood-soaked odes to ludicrousness (and CIA Death-Listed polar bears) it marked a major shift in what science fiction was and could be in the popular consciousness, one that quickly spread over to the US and became one of the dominant paradigms of halfway-decent science fiction.

And, of course, the *2000 AD* crowd also ended up having a bit to do with Doctor Who, but that's another essay.

Going To Be Alone Again (*Warriors' Gate*)

It's January 3rd, 1981. St. Winifred's School Choir is at number one with "There's No One Quite Like Grandma," which is unfortunate. One week later John Lennon takes number one with the posthumous rerelease of "Imagine," one of three number one hits he had that week along with "Happy XMas/War is Over," "(Just Like) Starting Over," and, later on, "Woman." ABBA, The Police, Adam & The Ants, Queen, and Phil Collins also chart.

In real news, the Salvadoran Civil War starts to get ugly as the FMLN launches a major offensive against the US-backed military government, which, over 1980, murdered nearly 12,000 people, and upped it to 16,000 unarmed civilians in 1981. Ulster Defence Association gunmen shoot and wound former MP Bernadette Devlin McAliske. The first DeLorean is made in Dunmurry, Northern Ireland, of interest to fans of lesser time travel narratives, and in one of the great "fuck yous" of international politics Iran releases its American hostages minutes after Ronald Reagan is inaugurated to replace Jimmy Carter.

While on television there is a castle with a ruined feast hanging in an empty void on the edge of the universe. Mechanized suits of armor stalk the halls as noble lion men fight to regain their freedom. And the noblest Roman strikes off on her own, finally ridding herself of her own chains, forged not so much out of dwarf star alloy as red and burgundy wool.

Warriors' Gate is a strange beast. A story structured with overt poetry, thematic associations link the very fabric of the world together as much as scientific reason. In this regard it is the biggest test case of the Bidmead approach: a poetic setting extrapolated from science. On one level there's the frame that's been holding the last three stories together, the so-called "E-Space Trilogy." In truth this trilogy linkage is less useful than we might hope. The thematic "reworking past eras" trilogy of *Meglos, The Leisure Hive,* and *State of Decay* and the three science fairy tales at the end of the season (of which this is the first) are far tighter trilogies than three stories into which the idea of a miniature external universe with negative coordinates was shoehorned in.

The idea of E-Space is simple enough. The CVE is essentially a wormhole, and E-Space is as basic a parallel universe as they come. But here, finally, we have the idea explored as more than a mere plot hook (although there is something to be contemplated in the idea that Alzarius is actively the inversion of Gallifrey). If E-Space is to be understood as negative space and the normal N-Space as positive then what of the zero point between the universes? What would that be like?

But from this exploration of a more or less scientific concept, the story opens up onto a rather eccentric vista. I used the word poetic, but there's an

obvious oddity to this term when applied to television. Typically when we use the word "poetic" we really mean "lyrical," that is, essentially working according to a non-narrative structure. Lyric poetry, contrasted with the narrative form of epic poetry, is a poetry based on the expression of emotions. But film and television are almost entirely narrative media. A tradition of experimental film existed by 1981, but it was still obscure and, well, experimental. It's not something you can just spring on BBC1 in a family slot and expect people to catch on.

Or, at least, you couldn't were it not for the fact that the music video was increasingly in ascendance. In the US, MTV would launch in eight months, but of course, the idea of MTV is only possible when its underlying concept is familiar. In the UK the concept existed within *Top of the Pops,* a program that requires explanation and description in a couple of ways. First of all, its nature. That's simple enough. It showed quasi-live performances – a combination of live performance and backing tracks – of popular music.

Second, its purpose. The BBC, being a public broadcaster, could not out and out get involved in taste-making. This posed a problem for any effort it might want to make to document rock music and youth culture. Its solution was thus necessarily to be documentarian about it. *Top of the Pops* would feature whatever was popular. Any single climbing the charts was eligible, and no week-to-week repetitions were allowed unless the song was the number one. By design and mandate it wasn't allowed to flinch or avoid things unless they were blatantly inappropriate. As a result counterculture got free reign on *Top of the Pops* – even the Sex Pistols made a 1977 appearance.

Third, however, is more subtle. *Top of the Pops* was an artifact of the television theater approach that characterized the BBC. *Top of the Pops* performances were full of visual trickery and effects, which is why glam rock, a major cultural cousin of Pertwee-era Doctor Who, happened in the first place. But they were still basically live performances – whatever video tricks and pop art touches were added, the basics of a *Top of the Pops* video was still the idea of the band on a stage playing instruments.

But in the late 1970s *Top of the Pops* began allowing limited numbers of pre-recorded music videos. This is another symptom of the larger shift in the nature of television away from the BBC's theatrical model and towards a new, different model. Specifically, television became something that incorporated the video clip as a discrete and manipulable object. This has been manifesting across the board – in the increasing realization that junking the BBC archives was a mistake, in the shift towards a more heavily edited style for Doctor Who, and in how music is performed.

What this allowed is best captured in the music video for David Bowie's "Ashes to Ashes." Abandoning the notion of the performance for a series of solarized, deformed video clips nested within one another, Bowie's persona flickers from form to form, the mercurial performativity that had defined his career at once literalized in video and captured in a song that cannibalizes his

own past. It marks a point where the language of video and editing could be wedded to the lyrical structure of music as opposed to a narrative structure.

Warriors' Gate ports that visual language back into the realm of the narrative. The space between two universes manifests as a music video, television in a featureless void becomes television in its lyrical mode. The result is the most cinematic Doctor Who has ever been. The lengthy tracking shots through the spaceship evoke those of *Alien* – indeed, the homage seems almost deliberate this time: an unmistakably grimy, working-class spaceship defined as a whole space instead of just as a set. But the narrative itself is simply the play of symbols. The actions of the Doctor righting the cup in a ruined feast and later angrily knocking one over are as important to the plot development as any sleuthing about or cleverness he engages in.

Here, then, we circle around the heart of the Bidmead approach. I have previously suggested that Doctor Who does not do a very good job of endorsing rationalism and rejecting superstition – a topic addressed in detail last volume in the essay on *The Masque of Mandragora*. But with Bidmead we have a second test case, someone who is as adamant about grounding Doctor Who in rationalism and rejecting superstition and magic as anyone has ever been. And yet here we have a story where everything is governed according to a logic of symbol, a story where the world in every way runs according to the logic of magic. On the most basic level this seems as though we must call Bidmead's sincerity into question when he talks about removing magic from the show.

Two points, then. First of all, if we take Bidmead's task as the rejection of magic-based narrative structures, his job was impossible from the start. Narrative is always magic. On a basic level, Aristotelean structures mean that everything in a story is significant, either pointing forward to set up the inevitability of later events or to explain the significance of either ones. Narrative is conspiratorial – always and necessarily so. There is a teleology to narrative, and every story has a god. Even at the most basic and literal level, narrative makes sense as narrative because we assume an authorial consciousness controlling its contents. There is no such thing as atheistic fiction, because all fictional universes, in point of material, real fact, have a godlike author figure. This is the real reason why even *Masque of Mandragora* can't throw off superstition. Because at the end of the day even a false prophet like Heironymous is giving the audience information through his prophecies. They are not mere babble void of content, but communicative, revealing statements. Magic is always real in fiction.

Second, and perhaps more significantly for our purposes here, Bidmead is a very intelligent man who is unlikely to have been unaware of this. If anything, the fact that he made stories like *Warriors' Gate* suggests very strongly that he knew what he was doing. He understood instinctively that narrative is an overtly magical medium. As I've said before, his goal was always to wed those magical tendencies to a scientific model.

In a way this is just a restatement of Clarke's Law – the maxim that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Thus by

pushing science past the point of understanding Bidmead is able to generate magic-like effects out of science. The point, from this perspective, is simply that it's not really magic – it's just fancy science. This is, if you will, the last stand of the purely rationalist defense. The last way you can draw the line and try to hold Bidmead and Doctor Who as some sort of arch-rationalist project. And up to this point it worked. You could, if you wanted to be adamant enough, insist that this was what Bidmead was doing. Less so that it's what Doctor Who as a whole was doing, but even that's down to some very old story elements.

Actually, it's bleakly fitting. There's an event we missed talking about in *Shada* – a news story that would have happened while that story aired. The man with perhaps the best claim to having created Doctor Who, David Whitaker, died on the 4th of February, 1980. And it is Whitaker who, in the end, most troubles the idea that Doctor Who is a rationalist show. His stories are drenched in alchemical symbolism, as we've noted many times before. If you want to argue that Doctor Who is a fifty-year-old quasi-sentient metafiction that has actively placed the spirit of Hermes Trismegistus into the heart of contemporary British culture – and I admit that I do – you face an uphill battle. Except for the fact that David Whitaker essentially created the show. Do I believe that David Whitaker actually consciously did this?

I don't disbelieve it. Let us leave it at that.

Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Very well. Let us then offer... a corollary? An inverse? It has, of course, been stated before, obvious inversion that it is. But no sourced version can be located, it seems. Nobody actually knows who first inverted it. In practice, for us, the name is obvious. We'll call it Whitaker's Law, even if he never codified it as such. No. That's wrong. Not Whitaker's Law. Whitaker's Heresy.

Any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from science.

Whitaker's Heresy haunts all of Doctor Who, lurking about in the shadows being unseemly and suggesting with a startling lack of decorum that the lady doth protest far, far too much. Oh, yes, all of these ancient gods are just aliens. Of course. Nothing to see here. Move along, lest Miss Hawthorne get a word in edgewise and point out that this is how magic has always worked anyway.

Oh, yes. Miss Hawthorne. If Whitaker is haunting the program literally as well as figuratively now, having disappeared into eternity without so much as a thorough interviewing to finally nail down what it was he was doing, we mustn't forget about the other overtly magical influence on the program, Mr. Barry Letts. The one we know was high on Dennis Wheatley at the least, whose debut on the series was directing Whitaker's last solo script, who wrote *The Daemons*, and who got brought on to supervise for Nathan-Turner's first year. We know he had his fingers in *Warriors' Gate*, rewriting the I Ching sections a bit.

And then there's Bidmead. The arch-rationalist. Or, if the heresy may be permitted, the truest spiritual successor to David Whitaker to date. Let us remember that Bidmead's belief was that the show had strayed too far from its

original mandate of teaching science to kids. But who was in charge for that original mandate? Whose view of the program was Bidmead actually returning to? Clarke's Law and Whitaker's Heresy are already, by their nature, indistinguishable. One can never quite tell which is in play. But by simultaneously embracing the development of a new visual grammar for television and a drive towards real science, Bidmead conflated the two more completely than anyone on the series had before. He is the ultimate Whitakerian heretic.

Warriors' Gate hangs suspended between two universes, a mirror reflecting each back at itself, sitting at the threshold. On one side a scientific concept, the play of "Charged Vacuum Emboitments" (and what an odd term, "emboitment." Wherever might that come from, and what might its significance be? Ah well. Surely the concept won't come up again, so let's not worry about it) becomes the occasion for a set of symbols to interact. On the other side, the symbols and the interactions that stem necessarily from those concepts can be named and treated as a predictable system, at least from within the system. The two views are coextensive.

Here we start to see what the magic was that Bidmead sought to eliminate. It was specifically the use of magic as an excuse to not explain things – the sort of silly play whereby the Doctor survives things or accomplishes things simply because he is the Doctor. It is an assertion that the Doctor's mercurial powers must function materially now – that he must not simply destabilize the world but work his way through it, using language and observation and play within the system to dismantle it. The Doctor's magic must be advanced magic, indistinguishable from technology, based on the play within a system, and the rules, ambiguities, and gaps of that system.

The problem, then, is the Doctor. Baker remains magnificent in the part, but the series is, in this model, forced to fight against him continually. Not just in terms of his own preferences for the series, which were much more in line with what he got from Graham Williams than what he was getting now, nor in terms of his increasingly difficult behavior, but in the basic nature of his character. The Doctor that Bidmead wants are the Doctors that Whitaker wrote for – the small and seemingly harmless men who skulked and observed and learned to understand the system before making a single decisive move within it. Not the Doctors of the 70s – big, starring, leading men who were the center of attention and whose charisma and likability drove the entire show.

In this regard, Bidmead's approach works better with Romana. Lalla Ward's imperious and elfish presence is perfect, and she's the best thing on offer here, once again stepping into the secondary Doctor role that has been increasingly carved out for her. She boggles and charms and throws people off guard, not clowning so much as conniving. The scene where she steps out of the TARDIS to deal with the slavers is pure Troughton.

But, of course, this is the problem. Romana steals the episode and then leaves. Ward, by all accounts, hated the emotionless nature of her departure, but frankly, she's wrong. It's a fantastic send-off, and her delivery of the line "no

more orders" makes it. It's the Problem of Susan solved: the companion who finally grows from girl sidekick to an equal who stares down the Doctor and makes him blink. In this exchange Romana upends the entire structure and logic of the show, confidently stealing the starring role out from under the Doctor. But the result is that we want to follow her, not the Doctor. She should be the protagonist, and her adventures in E-Space sound a damn sight more exciting than Tom Baker wandering around with that whiny prat in the yellow pajamas.

Never mind becoming the Doctor's equal. Lalla Ward has gone and bettered him.

That Jackanapes (*The Keeper of Traken*)

It's January 31st, 1981. John Lennon is down to two top ten singles – "Imagine" at number one, and "Woman" at number two. "Woman" takes the number one a week later, holds it for two weeks, and then yields to Joe Dolce Music Theater's "Shaddap You Face." John Lennon's posthumous chart success going down to "Shaddap You Face" has to, upon reflection, be one of the better metaphors for the fall of civilization ever. Ultravox, Slade, Dire Straits, Blondie, and Stevie Wonder also chart.

In real news we're a bit thin on the ground. Gro Harlem Brundtland becomes Prime Minister of Norway, while Wojciech Jaruzelski becomes Prime Minister of Poland and immediately begins trying to find an excuse to impose martial law. And the Stardust Fire happens in Dublin, killing 48 and teaching everyone that important lesson about not locking the fire exits which continues periodically and fatally to be ignored. On a related note, 21 people die in the Karaiskakis Stadium disaster in Greece, likely because of a failure to open an exit gate enough.

While on television it's *The Keeper of Traken*, a story that threatens to be overshadowed by its impact on the series' continuity. For the archive-centered Doctor Who fan the primary appeal of *The Keeper of Traken*, superficially, is a triple-header of events: the introduction of Nyssa, the introduction of the Anthony Ainley version of the Master, and the beginning of the loose trilogy of stories featuring the Master and covering the Doctor's regeneration.

Every single part of this is horrifically misguided. One of the more tedious debates available in fandom is whether or not Nyssa counts as a companion in this story. It's tedious because it's a classic pitched battle not merely over no stakes whatsoever but over a technicality of an invented concept. To be clear, the debate is not about whether Nyssa is a companion. There is no doubt that Nyssa is a companion. Similarly, there is no doubt that she debuts in this story. But because she doesn't join the TARDIS crew this story and is instead brought back midway through the next story, there's a debate over whether or not she counts as a companion in this story. Personally I advocate the far more entertaining fandom debate – if we take Peter Darvill-Evans's novel *Asylum* (see Volume Four) seriously and assume that the Doctor knows Nyssa is a companion from the start, does the Doctor's not taking Nyssa with him at the end of *Keeper of Traken* constitute a deliberate attempt to alter history?

(No, really – there's actually an entertaining theory to be spun here. The fact that the Doctor knows he meets Nyssa in his fourth incarnation means that he cannot regenerate until he does. This corresponds perfectly with his cockier and more domineering demeanor in the Williams era. And after meeting Nyssa in this story he becomes deeply sulky and funereal, as if he knows the jig is up. Of course, the idea that he's just grumpy about losing Romana is probably the

better explanation, or, at least, the one that anyone making the series in 1981 would have intended.)

But regardless of one's position on that particular trivia question – and let's face it, the debate really centers on the desire of some fans to have a reason to tell other fans they're wrong about something – there is a kernel of insight to be gleaned, namely that Nyssa's introduction in this story is not really an important part of what's going on here. She was deemed to be a good character and brought back, but this story was never designed with her as a long-term companion in mind.

Likewise, the debut of Anthony Ainley's Master is little more than a cliffhanger for *Logopolis* – and a dumb one, given what that story's trying to do. Yes, Ainley is here throughout the story as Tremas, which even incorporates the anagrammatic silliness surrounding the character in this era, but this story is not meaningfully about Ainley's Master; he's a twist in the final episode. For most of its runtime, the villain is not the Master in any meaningful or practical sense, and indeed, the story got a late rewrite in order to add the character. Again, it's important for what came after but almost wholly irrelevant to this specific story.

The only thing about the Master that is worth noting is that a new relationship with the series' past is introduced here. The Master isn't revealed until episode four, but the story parcels out clues in an almost matter-of-fact way prior to that. First is the revelation that the Melkur is in fact controlled by someone inside it (and that the interior is dimensionally problematic given the size of the Melkur, although given the frequency with which aliens in human suits are mis-sized, this actually barely registers as a clue). We then discover that this someone is a gaunt and disfigured man, that the interior of the Melkur is decorated with TARDIS-like roundels, and that it makes the familiar wheezing, groaning sound as it dematerializes, all of which point to the final reveal. But none of this is particularly called attention to or flagged as a clue. It's a relatively un-highlighted subtext for the more obsessive brand of fan who is likely to remember the fact that nearly eight years ago there was a regular Time Lord villain called the Master and that some four or five years ago the Master looked a bit like the guy in the Melkur statue does now.

Which leaves only its status as the first part of an accidental trilogy (since *Castrovalva* wasn't even remotely planned when this story and *Logopolis* wrapped). I suppose I've rather given the game away on that one by pointing out that it's an accidental trilogy, but there it is – this is in no way intended to be the start of some high-concept arc, and reading it through that lens is deeply misguided. Again, there's some distant interesting aspect here – the way in which Bidmead and Nathan-Turner navigate the nearly impossible task of writing Tom Baker out of Doctor Who is an impressive piece of television showrunning. They take the counter-intuitive but likely necessary approach of declining to make Baker's departure the climactic event or allowing him to be the star of it; instead they opt to build the Davison era's trappings up around Baker before finally deleting him from a show that's no longer his own. Certainly several major steps in that

direction happen here.

But all of these macro-level moments of significance pose a problem for *The Keeper of Traken* itself – one I remember vividly from when I finally got my hands on a VHS copy and watched the much-anticipated episodes. Yes, there are a bunch of things going on behind the scenes of tremendous importance for the future of the program, but they're collectively a tiny fraction of what's going on in this story. More to the point, if you watch *The Keeper of Traken* for these elements, the story ends up being something of a disappointment.

On its own merits, however, it's rather nice. The word "Shakespearean" gets thrown around a lot in relation to it, but inexplicably it's usually in relation either to the dialogue or the costumes and set. Given that Johnny Byrne and Christopher Bidmead are not exactly the go-to guys for searingly brilliant poetry and that "Shakespearean costumes" really just mean we're on another pseudo-medieval planet of the sort that we've seen three times already this season (including last episode), this argument holds very little water.

But that doesn't mean the adjective is wrong. There's something very Shakespearean about this story: the plot. In the end this is a story about a dying king and a battle of succession. The main characters are all noblemen and advisors to the throne. All of their defining actions come from character traits and personal motivation. Nobody is a programmatic character, save for Melkur, and his role in the story is more Hamlet's father than Iago. The plotting is completely open – the audience knows more than any of the characters (save for one major exception that we'll get to later). With Shakespeare it's exceedingly rare to have closed plotting and the setup of a dying king and a bunch of squabbling nobles is absolutely textbook. Even the Melkur's status as a magical statue faintly evokes *The Winter's Tale*, albeit with a cruel reversal. The only difference is that in Shakespeare the stranger whose arrival kicks things off would have been a secret heir to the throne and ultimately the suitor of Nyssa, and in Doctor Who it's Tom Baker.

Miles and Wood identify the style of the story as being that of children's television, and if I may be so bold as to suggest, this is actually basically the same thing as "Shakespearean." As Miles and Wood note, children's adaptations were commonplace around this time. And the BBC was, in 1981, in the midst of an epic series of adaptations of all of Shakespeare's plays. This is as straightforward an example of Doctor Who nicking a production style from elsewhere on television as exists in the series' history.

Which brings us to another point. Anyone who doubted the claim last essay that Bidmead is the closest thing to Whitaker's heir that the program has seen to date should consider that the last time the series went full-Shakespeare was in a Whitaker script that, like *Keeper of Traken*, was sandwiched between two deeply experimental pieces. This is a throwback right to the Hartnell era and its mandate to simultaneously educate and take the viewer to new places, alternating between science fiction oddness and familiar history pieces. Indeed, in the stretch of stories from *Full Circle* to *Logopolis* Bidmead manages to imitate this

structure perfectly, with the three more challenging scientific pieces placed around two stories that comment on familiar genres. The only difference is that in the Hartnell era the familiar genres were done as historicals, whereas now they fuse science fiction with period imagery.

So we get a Shakespearean plot in which the Doctor solves sciencey problems instead of revealing hitherto unknown information about the royal bloodline. It's yet another example of how Bidmead's approach can do anything, and more to the point, do it distinctively. Bidmead, over the course of this season, has figured out how to do Doctor Who in a way that retains the series' "do anything, go anywhere" potential while remaining distinctively Doctor Who. At the start, he demonstrated how his style could do all the things you expect Doctor Who to do. But at this point he's firmly in a second act of showing all sorts of new things his approach can accomplish that other ones can't.

Which brings us to the one exception to the open nature of the storytelling here: Melkur's unexpected ascension to the role of Keeper as the cliffhanger for Part Three. This is the one point where we discover that there was something big that we didn't know – that Melkur had a trick up his sleeve the audience wasn't aware of. But even this has firm roots within the Whitaker tradition that Bidmead is reanimating. It's just narrative collapse. Melkur suddenly and abruptly breaks the rules of the narrative, becoming a vastly more compelling villain in the process.

And here we get to the part of the story that does feed into the future. Because once Melkur breaks the rules of the narrative, the story is set up with just a bit of a problem: it has to find some account for why Melkur is able to defy the system. This is doubly true within the Bidmead aesthetic, where the narrative rules of the system are paramount because they extend from the scientific rules. When Melkur breaks the rules of the Shakespearean world it is, in fact, a massive jaw-dropper of a moment. It's just that the trick only works when you encounter the story in the wild. If you know going in that Melkur is really the Master then the revelation falls flat. If you don't, however, then it cuts against everything you think you know about the story simply because the story has, by all appearances, not been hiding anything prior to this point.

And so the story has to come up with a sufficiently compelling reason for why Melkur was able to break the rules. The answer, of course, is that he's the Master. And the story plays perfectly fair with this, giving enough clues that anyone with a good enough memory of the show can figure out that he's the Master before the big cliffhanger. But it's still a great trick, and it leads into *Logopolis* perfectly. The Master breaks this story and then escapes, setting up a season finale in which he breaks the entire structure of the show.

Crucial to this is the character of Tremas. Whatever fault might be laid at Anthony Ainley's feet for the latter days of the Master, the man could act, and his performance as Tremas is a masterpiece of quiet dignity. But by rights, given that the Doctor is not a secret nobleman who will take over Traken, Tremas should be the Keeper at the end of the story. That is, after all, the "correct"

restoration of balance. Indeed, the first clue that something is very much awry (other than the fact that bringing the Master back for that brief a twist ending would be utterly lame) is that the least developed character of the Council becomes the new Keeper instead.

And so when the Master brutally cuts down Tremas – and note that given *Keeper of Traken* is not structured like a Shakespearean tragedy but rather like a comedy or romance, Tremas should be perfectly safe – and steals his body, it is an egregious act of violence against the basic structure of the story. Tremas clearly isn't supposed to die. This is why it's wholly fitting that the Master should be reborn. Even without a decent plot explanation for why the Master can just pinch bodies that easily and why he didn't do it before, it makes thematic sense simply because it's such an act of violence against the plot. The Master is so audacious as to cheat the ending of a Shakespearean romance – of course he gets a new body! That's how it should be.

The only problem is that the season as a whole can't have it both ways. Next story it tries to set up an ambiguity as to whether the Watcher is the Master, but it completely flubs this by having us know what the new Master looks like. You can either sacrifice Tremas to the narrative collapse that causes the Master's rebirth and sets up the destabilization of the entire narrative logic of Doctor Who, or you can have a mysterious maybe-Master in the next story, but you can't actually do both.

But this is a minor complaint. What we have here is another deliberate and carefully measured step along a well-considered reinvention of what Doctor Who is and should be in the 1980s. For the first time in years we have a coherent vision of Doctor Who executed with reliable competence by the production team. This is a crowning glory for the show.

You Were Expecting Someone Else (*Doctor Who Weekly*)

When talking about the British comics industry in the 1980s, it is key to note that despite the vast number of important creators coming out of it, there were only a handful of truly significant British comics magazines. IPC had other publications beside *2000 AD*, but most would fold after a few issues and instead be incorporated into other magazines. Humor publications like *The Beano* and *The Dandy* existed, but in their own almost wholly parallel dimension. Dez Skinn published *Warrior*, which is as important a comics magazine as ever existed, but it still only lasted twenty-six issues. And Marvel UK had a motley of titles that combined repackaged US comics with original UK-market material. That was about it. It was a very small industry into which a very large amount of talent was packed.

As a result, when Dez Skinn created *Doctor Who Weekly* for Marvel UK, it was almost inevitable that it would attract some A-list creators. And so it is that Doctor Who comics have been created by Pat Mills and John Wagner (the creators, along with artist Carlos Ezquerra, of Judge Dredd), Steve Moore, Steve Dillon, Grant Morrison, Bryan Hitch, John Ridgway, David Lloyd, Dave Gibbons, and Alan Moore. For a variety of reasons we'll deal with the last of these in the next essay, and several of those creators who didn't actually work on Fourth Doctor strips will show up even later. But that still leaves us plenty to look at here – specifically the work of Pat Mills, John Wagner, Steve Moore, and Dave Gibbons.

The stories that get most of the attention are the first one, *The Iron Legion*, and the third, *The Star Beast*. Both are penned by Wagner and Mills, with art by Dave Gibbons (who handled the overwhelming majority of the Fourth Doctor strips). This is actually a bit unfortunate. Neither is actually very good. I mean, they're fine comic stories – Wagner and Mills are competent plotters, and Gibbons is obviously a fantastic artist. But the tone is all wrong. Wagner and Mills are action writers who belong on *2000 AD* and their attempts to fuse Doctor Who to a straightforward sci-fi action sort of space militarism make Eric Saward's efforts of the mid-80s look positively coherent by comparison.

It's not that they make any of the obvious mistakes. Their characterization of the Doctor is imperfect, certainly, but far from disastrous. He gets a couple of good moments throughout the strips. But for the most part he feels like a passenger, generally tagging along with some anti-authoritarian rebels with lots of guns as they blow things up and have elaborate chase scenes. It's obvious that the writers are enjoying their cyborgs, alien chariot races, and bizarre extraterrestrial parasites more than they're enjoying the actual star of the strips. Combined with a clear commitment to violent action (there's a cheeky yet

revealing panel in the first installment of *The Iron Legion* in which a shopkeeper is gunned down and several cans of baked beans are shown exploding in front of him in lieu of actual blood and gore) this is just... off tone for Doctor Who.

That's not to say that there aren't some great moments across the four Wagner/Mills stories. If nothing else there's Beep the Meep, an adorably cute little creature that happens to also be a galactic tyrant with some serious self-image issues. It's both a brilliant use of comics (where cute cartoony creatures thrive) and a great concept in general – an irony-fueled updating of the classic Robert Holmes villain. But these moments of grandeur are few and far between, and while *The Star Beast*, which debuts Beep the Meep, is clever, it's a better comic than it is Doctor Who.

But all of this is to approach the comics in hindsight, which is a self-evidently wrong way to go about it. These were slick and fun like no Doctor Who comics had ever been before – not even the brief good period the comics experienced in the middle of the Pertwee era. And while the violent tone of them feels odd today, in 1979 they were a welcome relief for many a fan dissatisfied with the "cheap and silly" feel of the late Graham Williams era. For someone who vehemently hates *The Creature from the Pit* or *Nightmare of Eden*, it's easy to see why these comics would appeal. And even if you did enjoy those stories, the excitement of seeing top-tier talent on the Doctor Who comic was undeniable. Mediocre work by Wagner, Mills, and Gibbons is still head-and-shoulders above most things.

But for my money, the more interesting strips in the early issues of *Doctor Who Weekly* were the backup strips by Steve Moore and Steve Dillon. Steve Moore is doomed forever to be better known as Alan Moore's best friend than he is for his own work, which is a mighty pity. He's not as good a writer as Alan Moore (they are not, as every piece on the two of them has to state by some sort of contractual obligation, related), but that's true of practically every comics writer and so hardly seems worth making a fuss about. In many ways he suffers from the same problems that Terrance Dicks does. He is an immensely functional writer whose stories have an unfussy zip to them. Unlike Alan Moore, Steve Moore has no particular fondness for lengthy captions or narrative voice. He tells entertaining and pacey stories and gets on with it.

And like Terrance Dicks, the ease with which he bashes out entertaining scripts obscures the fact that he's a tremendously inventive writer. In fields where people who are both brilliant and flashy about it exist, those who are brilliant and just get the job done too often get overlooked, and Steve Moore, like Dicks, is a prime example. For all that is made of Wagner and Mills creating Beep the Meep and Alan Moore's clever ideas in his handful of stories (Davies went out of his way to name-check the Deathsmiths of Goth, an obscure Moore creation, in his hilariously and wonderfully over-the-top fannish account of the Time War) nobody ever gives Steve Moore credit for inventing two of the most enduring concepts in the Doctor Who comics within a thirteen week period – Kroton the Cyberman and Abslom Daak, Dalek Killer.

Kroton the Cyberman is one of those searingly obvious concepts that it's a wonder it took until 1979 for anyone to do: a Cyberman who retains his emotions. But unlike the latter renditions on the part of Marc Platt or Chris Chibnall, Kroton is not primarily defined by a sort of excruciating agony at his own body horror. Instead he displays a quieter and more existential sort of angst, brooding and philosophizing his way through life. The result is in many ways the first story since *The Tenth Planet* to actually feature the Cybermen as they were originally designed: philosophical challenges to the nature of humanity instead of clanking robots. Kroton is, to Steve Moore's credit, a proper star monk.

Abslom Daak, on the other hand, is just hilarious. A flagrant parody of the standard issue *2000 AD* hero, Daak is an over-the-top action hero with a chain sword (a chainsaw/sword hybrid) who slaughters Daleks out of overt pathology. The two Moore-penned Abslom Daak stories consist of Daak casually cutting through Daleks and emoting excessively, which takes a broad swipe at the Terry Nation-style Dalek Annual stories. Daak has just enough depth to be a usable character who avoids being a one-note joke (at least as Moore conceived him – later writers cheerily removed that depth in favor of the one-note joke), but remains utterly absurd at his core. Although his strips don't particularly feel like Doctor Who, in an era where programmatic parodies like Duggan appeared regularly in the series they at least feel like an idea that could be merged in with the parent series.

In both cases we can see the real appeal of the backup stories. They took existing Doctor Who concepts – typically classic villains – and expanded cleverly on them. Early on they were by and large better than the main stories. Then, for whatever reason, Pat Mills and John Wagner moved on. This had two main results. First, the backup strip opened up and Alan Moore came onboard, which again, we'll get to. But second, Steve Moore got promoted to lead writer.

The ensuing seven stories are in many ways the high point of Doctor Who in comics. For one thing, Steve Moore demonstrated, both here and in his backups, a remarkable and almost unheard of trait for the writer of a Doctor Who comic, namely that he'd clearly watched the series. He's said in interviews that he really only watched while working on the comic, but it's still obvious that he bothered to think about how the series worked. The Doctor actually resolves situations in ways that closely resemble the sorts of things he does on television. This is staggeringly innovative for Doctor Who comics, which generally fall miles from reaching that bar.

But equally, Steve Moore's features tell stories that generally could only work in the comics (which, after all, ought to be the point of doing comics). In some cases this is just a matter of scope. His first main feature, *The Time Witch,* is a clever little story of a mental duel between the Doctor and the eponymous Time Witch, but makes little effort to do more than set up a situation where the Doctor and the villain can both create anything they imagine and then work through the battle. It's full of entertaining moments – most obviously when the Doctor and the Witch each create identical big hulking guards who then go at

each other, with the Witch's guard repeating her instruction to "kill them" while the Doctor's repeats "make a cup of tea." But it's a slender little story that doesn't have nearly enough depth to sustain a four-week serial. In other words, it's exactly what a Doctor Who comic is for.

Other times Moore's ideas are untranslatable for budgetary reasons. His longest feature, *The Dragon's Claw,* throws the Doctor into a kung-fu movie in which the mysterious "Eighteen Bronze Men" turn out to be Sontarans. It's a raucous little piece that behaves exactly how a genre fusion like "Doctor Who does kung-fu" should, helped by the fact that Steve Moore is in fact an avid fan of both the kung-fu genre and of Chinese culture at large (he's produced several books of commentary on the I Ching from reputable publishers and is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society); his tone captures both the manic glee of a bad kung-fu movie and the vast scope of Chinese mythology and culture. But it would be unfilmably expensive with several colossal battle sequences. Sure, it'd make a glorious four-parter, but even in today's glossy series that would be impossible on a television budget. Instead it's a comic, and we're lucky to have it.

Steve Moore's best strip, a single-issue eight-page story called "The Spider-God," combines both of these tricks. Its concept is full of visuals that take advantage of the fact that the budget for comics is the same no matter what you make the artist draw. Spaceships, giant spiders, people hatching from eggs, massive webs, and huge numbers of cocooned people all show up in an eight-page stretch. It's *The Web Planet* gone overboard. But on the other hand, it's a mere eight-pager. There's not enough story here to make 25 minutes, little yet 100.

But in this story, that's an advantage. Moore efficiently sets up a mystery around what the giant spiders are doing, then has a bunch of human colonists freak out in misunderstanding about what's going on, which leads to them gunning down the spiders. The Doctor explodes in rage before we finally get it adequately explained that the spiders and the native humanoids on this planet live in a symbiotic and peaceful relationship. The strip ends with a single panel of the human commander's arm dropping his gun in horror at what he's done as the Doctor, back turned to the reader, stalks away in anger. It's the pro-environment story Barry Letts always wanted to do in the Pertwee era, only done with efficient grace and epic scale in an eight-page comic. It is frankly better than 80% of the actual televised Tom Baker era.

It is also, unfortunately, Steve Moore's last strip – a dispute with the editor of the magazine over the writing of an Abslom Daak story led to both Moores ditching the magazine, Alan in solidarity with his friend. The next writer, Steve Parkhouse, is perfectly fine but lacks the sense of the tone and approach to Doctor Who that Steve Moore instinctively had. A strip like "End of the Line" is interesting, and it's got an emotional sucker punch of an ending, but it's breathtakingly and excessively bleak. Again, a fine enough comic, but not a great Doctor Who comic.

And shortly thereafter Dave Gibbons would depart. The comic would

enjoy good artists and good writers a couple of times over the remainder of its run, and we'll deal with them as they crop up, but the pinnacle of Doctor Who in comic form had passed. It never again had a writer of Steve Moore's quality or an artist of Dave Gibbons's for an extended run. Still, the early year or two of strips in *Doctor Who Weekly* (and later *Doctor Who Monthly*) were an extraordinary moment in the history of Doctor Who comics, even without looking at the brief but compelling intersection of the best comics writer of his generation with Doctor Who.

You Were Expecting Someone Else (Alan Moore's Doctor Who Comics)

Let us first stipulate that there is relatively little reason to care about these particular comics on their own merits, in either Alan Moore's oeuvre or the Doctor Who canon. Bits of them – particularly "Black Death" – may have credible cases for placing in any given top-ten list of Doctor Who comics, but they're not self-evidently the best Doctor Who comics ever or anything, as one might hope from the combination of Alan Moore and Doctor Who.

On the other hand, there's something fundamentally irresistible here. I mean, obviously there is – I wouldn't do an esssay like this if there weren't. But I'm also hardly the only one. Russell T. Davies himself name-checks Alan Moore's Deathsmiths of Goth in a text piece published about the Time War. Miles and Wood argue that it was Moore's take on Time Lord history in "Star Death" that shifted the consensus view of the relationship between Rassilon and Omega. And more generally speaking, starting from 1987 and continuing to the present day, Alan Moore has been a massive influence on the show whether directly or indirectly. (Consider, for instance, that Neil Gaiman was a protégé of his.) Much like Douglas Adams before him and Neil Gaiman after him, Alan Moore carries a massive fanbase that is separate from Doctor Who, and thus the intersections between the two of them carry odd and peculiar resonances.

This doesn't change the fact, however, that we're talking about a mere twenty-eight pages of comics here, most drawn with David Lloyd, later to be Moore's artist on *V For Vendetta*. His first two stories consist of four two-page installments, and then he did a set of three interconnected one-parters at four pages each. That is it. We are not talking about a huge contribution to Doctor Who here. Furthermore, all of these were published in 1980 and 1981. These predate anything that it would be fair to call a major work of Moore's. This is Alan Moore, in other words, before he was even one of the very goods, little yet before he was one of the greats.

It shows, most particularly in his second offering, "Business as Usual." He's reliant on clunky and awkward thought bubbles to convey exposition; for instance, a character explores an industrial plant and thinks, "This must be the warehouse section. It seems to be full of kids' toys. I suppose it figures... after all, our reports say that toys are Galaxy Plastic's main product..." It's a case of poor mechanics – to put it simply, Moore isn't using the medium well enough to get the exposition out organically. The pacing, similarly, is badly flawed. This is one of Moore's first multi-part stories, and he hasn't yet figured out how to make each two-page installment a distinct experience. It's really an eight-page story with four cliffhangers as opposed to a story comprised of four two-part installments.

But although Moore's mechanics are still rough at this phase, even in this – by far the weakest of his Doctor Who efforts – there's quite a bit that's sharp. Moore has a solid handle on what makes Auton stories fun, and the touch of evil toy soldiers that actually shoot people is worthy of Robert Holmes. And under the hood the story has a good idea: linking the routine nature of alien invasions (the fact that they're "business as usual" in Doctor Who) to the sociopathic excesses of corporate culture, and using the plastic, manufactured Autons to tell a story about that. It's easy to argue that Moore gets the Autons better than anyone since Robert Holmes did.

He's even got a solid handle on the idea that the dual word/image nature of comics means that you can juxtapose information. The first part has a running narration provided via captions that muse, over two panels, "It was quite normal for a man in Blunt's position to appoint his successor... / after all... what if something should happen to him?" But the second caption is over a panel in which a panicked character announces, "It's Mr. Blunt... H-He's shot himself!!" Neither the panel nor its caption on their own reveal what's happened, but the juxtaposition between two channels of information provides story enough. It's a good technique – one that Moore would eventually make much use of in *Watchmen*. All of this demonstrates that Moore can already pull off virtuosic moments, but the overall flow of his writing is still choppy.

Or maybe it's just that Autons aren't a particularly inspiring subject for him. His story from a few weeks earlier, "Black Legacy," is altogether more solid. An exploration party of Cybermen searching for an "Apocalypse Device" are slowly hunted and picked off by that device. In this story Moore manages a density of ideas that rivals Bob Baker and David Martin: Cybermen haunted by bad dreams and prophetic visions, a weapon that wants to be used, a society of weapon makers who killed themselves to stop their own doomsday weapon, a disease that rots away Cybermen bodies, a base-under-siege story where the Cybermen are under siege – all of this is very solid. Unlike Baker and Martin, he manages to wrap it around character moments. Yes, it's a stock character – madly hubristic military leader whose arrogance dooms everyone around him – but it's a character with a distinct arc. And he manages moments that are genuinely chilling and unsettling throughout the piece.

What's interesting about "Black Legacy" is that it shows Moore finding ways to push the basic fabric of the Doctor Who narrative and universe. The story is specifically interesting because it's the Cybermen who are hunted and scared, and they're not supposed to be scared. The story would lose all power if it were greedy humans seeking the weapon because "greedy humans getting prophetic nightmares" is business as usual. But by putting the Cybermen in a story that is ostensibly wrong for them it becomes considerably more powerful. This may sound like an obvious point, but if one looks at the "classic monster" stories of Doctor Who up through 1980, when this was published, it was really only David Whitaker's Dalek stories that came anywhere close to building a story out of a frisson between the monster and the setting. It seems like a wholly

obvious sort of idea in 2012, but the fact of the matter is that writers up to 1980 hadn't figured out how to use that idea with Doctor Who's own core monsters. (Maddeningly, they really don't get it figured out until the show gets taken over by Alan Moore devotees, at which point it immediately becomes standard.) To be fair, Steve Moore had been doing things like this from the beginning with the comics, most obviously with Kroton the Cyberman, but Alan Moore takes it further, by and large. Steve Moore comes up with an interesting twist on the Cybermen; Alan Moore writes a story about a limit case of the Cybermen.

Then there are the three stories set around the war between Gallifrey and the Order of the Black Sun. Before diving fully into these, there are several things we should note. First of all, given that Moore ceased working for *Doctor Who Monthly* in solidarity with Steve Moore, there is no particular reason to think that he was "done" with the Black Sun as a setting. We are in essence looking at three fragments from a whole of unknown size. Second of all, there's equally little reason to think that there was some organized master plan on Moore's part that he had mapped out. We don't have a full story here as such, but to treat this as the beginning of a radical reconceptualization of Gallifrey is also misguided. For one thing, Moore does not appear to have been a fan of Doctor Who ever, really, and certainly not since the Hartnell era. (He's said that he thinks all of the post-Hartnell Doctors feel a bit too pedophilic for his tastes.) Which is to say that he's hardly the type to want to do a thorough continuity-laden job like sorting out Time Lord history. More likely, as Miles and Wood suggest, he chatted up a Doctor Who fan over a few pints and wrote from that research, hence his establishing that Rassilon and Omega were part of the same event in Time Lord history (a fact that was in no way clear in the television series at this point, or, indeed, any other).

But that Moore was not overtly planning a revamp of Gallifreyan history doesn't mean that his stories don't clearly gesture towards a vision of it. Given his relative detachment from Doctor Who it is surely coincidental that both he and Terrance Dicks/Christopher Bidmead turned towards a more fantasy-like conception of the Time Lords at almost the same time. Or, rather, both *State of Decay* and this are symptoms of a larger process, since in hindsight *Shada* turned more towards a view of Gallifrey as a source of ancient power than as a technological marvel. Nevertheless, it is worth noting explicitly that Moore's Rassilon is blatantly conceived as a wizard, that the name "Order of the Black Sun" comes from an occult/mystical background (and Moore wasn't even anywhere near converting to snake-worship yet), and that these stories are placed in Gallifrey's ancient past. This is flat-out science fantasy in the "long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" sense.

Also significant is the fact that Moore is playing with the nature of time travel more overtly than the series has ever really dealt with. The idea of a temporal war in which one side is attacked before they commit the act that is seen as kicking off the war is an interesting and complex one. More, though, than taking a particular monster and pushing them into a new type of story based

on the nuances of their concept, this begins examining the underlying premise of the show. The series hadn't played seriously with the consequences and nuances of time travel since *Day of the Daleks*, so the idea of a story with complex and non-linear causality was heavily overdue.

And it's equally worth noting that Alan Moore and the production team hit on this at almost the exact same moment, with Bidmead putting out *Warriors' Gate* and *Logopolis* in quick succession right around the time Moore was doing these comics. There's a temptation to suggest that this means Moore isn't nearly as ahead of his time with these comics as his fans would like to think, but I think we can afford to be more charitable. Being in step with Christopher Bidmead in 1980-81 is, in fact, being ahead of your time. One thing that's notable about Bidmead's Doctor Who is that it's an era that has seemingly increased in stature over time as more and more of it turned out to be prescient. That doesn't mean it lacks flaws – narrative logic is not always Bidmead's strong suit, and he can have a bit of a tin ear when it comes to speech patterns – but it does mean that the style of fantastic science fiction that Bidmead favors is something that the rest of the world eventually caught up to.

And Alan Moore, more than any other writer in Doctor Who comics, and in many ways more than almost any other writer at all in 1980, was right in step with Bidmead. Like Bidmead, he had some weaknesses in storytelling mechanics, at least in 1980-81. But unlike Bidmead, his future career is famous. And his Doctor Who work points towards it. He will hone his style over the next few years, but as soon as 1982 he's doing work like *Marvelman,* in which his instincts on how to write a story that cuts to the heart of an existing concept get their first really successful airing. And eventually he takes those skills to American comics to revamp *Swamp Thing* and, indirectly, the Charlton Comics stable of characters, before he expands his horizons away from licensed characters and towards whole swaths of literary and cultural history, and follows by sketching out an aesthetic and magical philosophy with revolutionary potential that better understands and describes how stories work and what they do in the general case than just about any other philosophy out there.

But, of course, this isn't his story. This is the story of Doctor Who, which he never came back to after 1981 and has made clear he never will. (Though to be fair, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Century 1969* has three Doctor Who references in it, one of them pleasantly obscure.) Nevertheless, this fleeting point of intersection is telling. Moore was thoroughly in step with what Doctor Who was doing in his early career. The 1980s are far kinder to Moore than they are to Doctor Who, and Moore quickly comes to outpace Doctor Who in quality by some miles. But this in turn means that when the pendulum swings back and Doctor Who begins being influenced by Moore in 1987 there is something natural to it – a case of Doctor Who being influenced by an outgrowth of itself. It is not, obviously, that Moore was influenced by Doctor Who. By all appearances he wasn't. Rather it is something subtler – the fact that Alan Moore and Doctor Who are, in many ways, different tellings of the same story. Though

they share only one landmark, they are vividly and clearly two drives through the same psychochronographic landscape.

Even if the twenty-eight pages of it that he wrote are mediocre.

Recursive Occlusion (*Logopolis*)

It's February 28th, 1981. The best-selling disc of black vinyl is still Joe Dolce Music Theatre's "Shaddap You Face," which lasts for two more weeks before Roxy Music overtake it with "Jealous Guy," which will play out the man with the scarf. Adam and the Ants, Ultravox, and The Who also chart. This relatively placid situation at the top of the musical charts obscures what goes on below. New Order are at #34 with their initial release, "Ceremony," a song originally planned for recording with their predecessor band Joy Division.

In the news, Augusto Pinochet, dear personal friend of the Iron Lady, is sworn in for another eight-year term as village butcher. Bobby Sands begins a hunger strike to demand status as a political prisoner. He dies in May. In Italy a supposed list of members of the Propaganda Due Masonic Lodge surfaces. The list is problematic – indeed, the entire story is problematic. The extent to which the lodge (expelled both from mainstream Masonry and, more broadly, from the entirety of Italian society) was a real organization and not a feverish fantasy conducted by would-be dictators is unclear. The supposed list of members includes people whose membership is best described as "not actually invited to join in any meaningful sense." It is a scandal too good to be true, but in that sense is somehow truer than mere factuality. The only thing that seems uncanny about discovering that Silvio Berlusconi was a member of a secret occult society plotting a right-wing takeover of Italy is the possibility that he has ever been together enough to pull off such a feat.

Returning briefly to music, also lower in the charts, The Jam howl with "That's Entertainment." It is the virtual soundtrack of the smoldering political situation, then. Not a month after Tom Baker's regeneration a chain of race riots will break out across Great Britain, culminating in July with the Toxteth riots in Liverpool. Thatcher's government will seriously consider simply abandoning Liverpool – allowing the city to decay to nothing and sink back into the russet-hued dirt from which it sprang. The flaw in the plan, as proposed, is its terminology. "Managed decline" is far too negative a term for leaving an entire major metropolitan area to choke on its own poverty.

This reality defies art, defies any attempt at response. What is there to détourn in a world where leaving a city to die is a serious proposal? What is there left to say in the face of this? All logic, all thought, all vision seems to break down, to collapse, not into the totalitarian unity of single vision and Newton's sleep but into the shattered olive-green darkness of negative space, the whole of existence inverted. That's entertainment. That's entertainment.

While on television... *Logopolis*.

Distantly, with no clear way up to it, there is a flickering yellow light. A final dream, perhaps, the coda to all of this. The prepared-for end. A fleeting scent of willow wafts by. One last throw of the dice. A last stab at rebirth. At

renewal. At regeneration. The light blossoms outwards, leaving a citrine filigree upon Thatcher's Kingdom. Three paths extend outwards. One, onyx-paved, features the head of what appears to be a crocodile, one eye peering bemusedly at you. A second, searing and vermilion, burns with radiant glamour to your left. On the right is a third path, darkly lit with a browning-yellow moonlight flecked with glints of silver.

Take the onyx road.

Take the vermilion road.

Take the moonlit road.

This near to the pinnacle of all things it is difficult to pin down specifics. A musky greyness is all there is. Neither thing nor absence, there is no purity here. At nearly the most refined point in the cosmos, scraping against eternity itself, we have passed knowledge, passed understanding. Now there is only Wisdom, the capacity to take a step, to act, to do something. In the beginning, and thus in the end, is the word.

Inasmuch as an action can be defined as causing a change, the Doctor, in the entire story, takes precisely three of them: he lands his TARDIS atop another Police Box that turns out to have been a trap, he lands it within a city of words, and he sends a CVE out into Cassiopeia. All three are the same action – the precise positioning of an emboitment. This, in the end, defines the Doctor's actions. If the TARDIS chooses the moment, which as we later learn she does, it is still the Doctor who injects her into them, who actually puts the box into place. In the end, all creation in Doctor Who is the same act: the Doctor lands the TARDIS.

We are returning to first principles here, but this is inevitable. This place represents first principles and beginnings. A magical box that breaks the world. A glorious madman who makes the box appear. From these things everything else follows. *Logopolis* is nothing more than a metaphor for those two simple concepts, and in being this it becomes a metaphor for everything else that Doctor Who is.

From here there is only one path.

Take the path.

Black pearls scented like myrrh abound in this place. There is a sweaty heat, full of sex and yearning, and yet also sacred, pristine and holy.

As the highest aspect of the sacred feminine, this realm in one sense reflects the major abscess that we have been circling around throughout this journey: the lack of any emotional core to the show. But here we have ascended too highly up the tree to limit ourselves to just that. What is at play here is not merely Nyssa or Tegan's inexplicable lack of grief. It is not even related to that directly anymore, except inasmuch as the absence of emotion forms a particular type of Understanding in its own right.

The best of Doctor Who works within dreams and memories, forming an emboitment within the viewer's mind that allows it to haunt the viewer, day and night. A universe maintained by chanting monks in a distant city of words, a universe that can come unstuck and begin to break down, a magical box inside a magical box, a projection of the future that lurks in the spaces at the edge of the story. These are the key concepts of *Logopolis*.

To watch *Logopolis* as a child is to be changed by it. Too much of this story is strange, fantastic, and genuinely unnerving to be otherwise. It is a nest of metaphors that are endlessly suggestive, endlessly gesturing towards uncanny possibility. It is a story that sleeps in our minds, offering the possibility of further mysteries. To fault this story for the future's failure to explore them is senseless. There is enough here to endlessly wander through its labyrinthine interiors. There is enough here to suggest a future. A great story is never complete, can never leave the viewer with nothing more to wonder or consider. Indeed, that is, by definition, the mark of a terrible story.

Even here, as we approach the summit of the tree, as our options and routes grow narrower, as we approach a conclusion, there is always more to say, always gaps, always things to note that were not brought up. Even given the prodigious length of this essay, it is not long enough to encompass all that must be understood.

Stay here forever if you like. If not, two paths emerge: sky-blue and rose scented, or purple and lined with palms.

Take the sky blue path.

Take the purple path.

Through the ruins of a city stalk the ruins of a man. He is wearing a Hawaiian shirt.

There is no way to avoid the prospect that this is the end of Doctor Who. To some extent one can be apocalyptic about any regeneration story, declaring that the "real" series ended there. But some – most obviously *The War Games* and this – lend themselves more to that sort of depressive thinking.

I am not among those who think so. For my money there are only two bad seasons in the 1980s (the Colin Baker ones, I fear), and even those have stories worth respecting and taking seriously amidst the sea of unceasing crap. But for those who hate the 1980s this becomes the last straw – the point where the one good thing the program had, Tom Baker, goes away and is replaced by an emo wimp, then by a psychotic circus clown, then by an overacting ham sandwich. Still others reject all of the new series. For some people, simply put, it's not Doctor Who after Tom Baker leaves.

It's true that even in the most optimistic reading things get bad more often after this. And more to the point, the seeds of this are in *Logopolis*. The fact, complained about several times throughout this essay, that nobody ever deals with Nyssa's anger at the Master or with the extermination of billions, perhaps trillions of people across the universe is an appallingly large problem that requires some thought about how it was allowed to happen. The blame can't be laid at Bidmead's feet – even though he does kind of puzzlingly fail to follow up sensibly from this to *Castrovalva* (an error made all the more strange by the fact that nothing about *Logopolis* seems to cry for an immediate sequel) he was on his way out the door. Following up plot threads wasn't his job.

But it was John Nathan-Turner's, who instead spends the next season fretting more about things like revamping the Cybermen, nuking the sonic screwdriver, and shoehorning a Concorde into the series than with piddly issues like storytelling. The actual plots of episodes became increasingly irrelevant to him, and more and more stories became ugly "kitchen sink" jumbles that just lumped in concepts that Nathan-Turner thought would attract viewers, even as the pool of viewers he bothered trying to attract dwindled ever more until it consisted of nothing but the most obsessive anoraks. And this is the frightening thing – the actual fact that nobody involved in Doctor Who appeared to even treat the issue that perhaps Nyssa should, in future confrontations with the Master, take the fact that he murdered her father and destroyed her home world seriously or that it should impact how she treats him. Similarly, Tegan manages to never bring up Aunt Vanessa with the Master over all of their interactions.

What is so utterly shocking here is that in other places the show is completely and utterly obsessed with continuity. We thus have the bizarre spectacle of people caring enough to change the name of the spaceship in *State of Decay* because the original name had already been used back in *The Mutants*, but not caring about the most basic aspects of characterization. The show is invested only in the spectacle of the past – the montage of past characters, the nods to

past stories, the return of past monsters. Never in a sense of history. Never in the sense of characters changing or having any sort of dramatic arc. Never in anything that isn't chum for the narrow segment of people who care if the Cybermen ever return.

That's what killed the program. That's why it goes under. Because in the end, John Nathan-Turner doesn't care about the program as anything more than a succession of images.

You have died.

Continue.

Through the ruins of a city stalk the ruins of a man. He is wearing a Hawaiian shirt.

There is no way to avoid the prospect that this is the end of Doctor Who. To some extent one can be apocalyptic about any regeneration story, declaring that the "real" series ended there. But some – most obviously *The War Games* and this – lend themselves more to that sort of depressive thinking.

I am not among those who think so. For my money there are only two bad seasons in the 1980s (the Colin Baker ones, I fear), and even those have stories worth respecting and taking seriously amidst the sea of unceasing crap. But for those who hate the 1980s this becomes the last straw – the point where the one good thing the program had, Tom Baker, goes away and is replaced by an emo wimp, then by a psychotic circus clown, then by an overacting ham sandwich. Still others reject all of the new series. For some people, simply put, it's not Doctor Who after Tom Baker leaves.

It's true that even in the most optimistic reading things get bad more often after this. And more to the point, the seeds of this are in *Logopolis*. The fact, complained about several times throughout this essay, that nobody ever deals with Nyssa's anger at the Master or with the extermination of billions, perhaps trillions of people across the universe is an appallingly large problem that requires some thought about how it was allowed to happen. The blame can't be laid at Bidmead's feet – even though he does kind of puzzlingly fail to follow up sensibly from this to *Castrovalva* (an error made all the more strange by the fact that nothing about *Logopolis* seems to cry for an immediate sequel) he was on his way out the door. Following up plot threads wasn't his job.

But it was John Nathan-Turner's, who instead spends the next season fretting more about things like revamping the Cybermen, nuking the sonic screwdriver, and shoehorning a Concorde into the series than with piddly issues like storytelling. The actual plots of episodes became increasingly irrelevant to him, and more and more stories became ugly "kitchen sink" jumbles that just lumped in concepts that Nathan-Turner thought would attract viewers, even as the pool of viewers he bothered trying to attract dwindled ever more until it consisted of nothing but the most obsessive anoraks. And this is the frightening thing – the actual fact that nobody involved in Doctor Who appeared to even treat the issue that perhaps Nyssa should, in future confrontations with the Master, take the fact that he murdered her father and destroyed her home world seriously or that it should impact how she treats him. Similarly, Tegan manages to never bring up Aunt Vanessa with the Master over all of their interactions.

What is so utterly shocking here is that in other places the show is completely and utterly obsessed with continuity. We thus have the bizarre spectacle of people caring enough to change the name of the spaceship in *State of Decay* because the original name had already been used back in *The Mutants*, but not caring about the most basic aspects of characterization. The show is invested only in the spectacle of the past – the montage of past characters, the nods to

past stories, the return of past monsters. Never in a sense of history. Never in the sense of characters changing or having any sort of dramatic arc. Never in anything that isn't chum for the narrow segment of people who care if the Cybermen ever return.

That's what killed the program. That's why it goes under. Because in the end, John Nathan-Turner doesn't care about the program as anything more than a succession of images.

You have died.

Continue.

The smell of cedar drifts among the clouds of a TARDIS-blue sky. There is a sense, not of utter calm (this sky can storm – indeed, it could storm at any moment), but of a serenity. This place has so much Mercy...

The stentorian nature of Hartnell's Doctor extends inevitably through all later incarnations. There is always something paternal to the Doctor. Not just paternal in the sense of being protective, but in the sense of invulnerability. There is a time in which all of our fathers are invulnerable. In which nothing bad can ever happen to them or around them. So is it with the Doctor. His companions shall always be safe, he shall always save the day, and then he shall flash the trademark toothy grin and all will be well.

There is also, cruelly and inevitably, a point where we realize that this is a lie. A point where we give in and watch *Logopolis* even though we know how it ends, even though we don't want to see it. A point where we visit our father in the hospital after his stroke and begin (but never, not even years after, finish) coming to terms with the fact that some vital essence of who he was has gone forever. There comes a point where fathers falter and prove inadequate.

This point comes in more ways than one here. The transition from Baker to Davison marks a move from a Doctor who essentially displays no negative emotions in his entire tenure save for occasional fear – even his anger is righteous – to a Doctor who endlessly displays a newfound vulnerability and softness. One who is better at learning than knowing. One who, when he presides over an adventure in which everyone is slaughtered, mourns that there should have been another way. One who even fails to save a companion.

Nevertheless, it is this paternal kindness that persists. It is the thing that most defines the Doctor (and it is telling that the incarnation where it is most vividly absent is by far the least popular). This is what regeneration means – that no matter how much "youth" and "vulnerability" is ever introduced into the character he will always endure and protect. A father who falls short of adequacy – who is, in other words, human and not a god – is still a father. In many ways, perhaps, a superior one.

Only one road leads from here: a deep indigo one up beyond the sky itself. The other alternative – the only other – is to fall, to plummet into the very depths of the abyss. And yet this option, terrifying as it is, appeals to a part of you. It chants endlessly within you, go down, go down, go down, go down.

Go Down.

Take the deep indigo path.

An angry, raging place of fiery reds and molten iron that smells of tobacco and smoke, the clanging and shrieking noise feels like you're in the very crucible of the world. This is the place where all that is impure and flawed is seared out, where perfection is obtained not through the process of improvement and redrafting but through the raw act of destruction of all that is unworthy.

What must be seared out of Doctor Who at this juncture? We have spoken enough in other sections of the tree about the issue of Baker and his ego, although reiteration is the nature of an exploration of this project and it cannot be fully omitted. Doctor Who must, at some point, be decoupled from Baker no matter how much we genuinely adore him. The show must be bigger than him. By Season Eighteen, Pertwee, Troughton, and Hartnell are all but burnt from the program's immediate memory. So too must Baker be, even if he is in one sense the program's greatest Strength.

So too the emotionlessness – the way in which stories are reduced to little more than logic exercises or opportunities to show off the production team's brilliance. This is a recent affliction, and highlights the darker side of this process. The previous burning out of the old did away with magic in favor of worlds built of science, and in the process found a new wellspring of magic. But in doing so it, in turn, burnt away the focus on character and motivation. In the Williams era villains and allies alike were defined primarily by what they wanted. Now, instead, they are defined ontologically, in ways stemming entirely out of the story's structure. The Monitor and the Master are who they are purely because that is their role, as was the Keeper's, as was Biroc's, as was, as was, as was. The Williams era had a wholly alien main cast, but they continually alit in worlds full of humans. Even when the guest cast was not literally human, they were consistently enmeshed in human concerns and human desires.

But in this season both the cast and where they go have been wholly alien. The series lacks all touch of humanity. Odd, in that regard, that it should finally return to Earth to kill the Doctor, and that it should give the Doctor his first contemporary human companion in over four years. Odd that this is where the burning out of Baker should commence. The crucible in which he is incinerated is also the crucible from which springs what his replacement must be.

The fires of this place grow too hot to endure. Three options present themselves – a deep purple path lined with sunflowers, a maroon path lined with lotuses, or a deeply uncomfortable and upsetting looking drop into a cavernous abyss that vividly represents the end of all things.

Take the purple path.

Take the maroon path.

Plummet off the cliff into what is surely the complete annihilation of your entire being.

A golden light extends across everything, not from some definable point or source, but from the very being of this place. No shadows, just a frankincense-tinted light that flows out of all things. Only one word describes this: Beauty.

The Holy Guardian Angel is a core concept in Hermetic mysticism. The higher, prophetic self. The true will in whose name all magic is practiced. The analogue to *Logopolis* is straightforward enough – the Watcher is unambiguously serving in that role for the Doctor. But several complexities arise out of this seemingly straightforward analogy.

First and foremost is the fact that, at least as a script, the conscious decision is made to try to imply that the Watcher is in fact the Master. This plays out with less than complete clarity in the episodes themselves, but the very conceptual ambiguity is intriguing. These sorts of doublings are, of course, wholly sensible in occult terms. We are at this point reaching the higher portions of the tree. Broadly speaking, this point is the point of contact between the earthly and material energy of the lower sephira and the more purely divine energy of the higher. Shortly above it comes Da'ath, the unnumbered void sephira – the point where the main tree and the qlippoth have their most direct contact. What I am getting at, in other words, is that the qlippothic form of the Doctor and his Holy Guardian Angel are not unrelated concepts. They can't be. Part of the image of this contact point between the earthly and the divine is that they are not actually separate – that even the most debased forms of the universe are in their own sense holy.

Second is the fact that the Watcher represents the future of the show. The Doctor's highest self, in other words, is his own continuation, the chronic incompleteness of his narrative. We knew this, implicitly, and have seen it before, but here again is another iteration of the concept. The Doctor's true will is to be continued. (This ties back to the latent connection between the Watcher and the Master. The Doctor's true will is his own continuation, but the nature of Time Lord immortality is that continuation and death are equivalent. Those who like to cheat and look ahead will, of course, delight in the existence of the Valeyard at this juncture.)

Third and most important is the fact that the Watcher has been in every episode we have seen so far, implicitly. A name like "the Watcher" in a television show cannot help but be symbolic. So in this sense we are and always have been the Doctor's Holy Guardian Angel. It is our own proleptic desire for more that animates the show, the fact of our presence that drives its alchemy. It is because of us, the viewers, that the story began, that it drove two schoolteachers into a junkyard to fall out of the world and subsequently turn a cranky old man into a hero, and it is this spirit that has pushed the program forward.

But even here there is a dark side. It is the Watcher who makes the Doctor go to Logopolis, taking the Master with him and nearly dooming the universe. The oft-ignored massive genocide of this story is entirely upon the Watcher's head. And if we are the Watcher, it is upon our heads as well. Which, of course, it is. It is for the viewer's sake that there must be stakes and tension in the

Doctor's adventures – for the viewer's sake that he must be haunted by death and trauma. It is because there is a viewer who must be appeased and thrilled that terrible things happen. So it is our desire for continuation as much as it is the Doctor's.

This sobering truth internalized, we may move on. Five roads continue from here. The first is blue and of meticulous and conscious design. The second glows with a pale sense of danger. The third is silver and extends far into the heavens. The fourth is a majestic, imperial red. And the fifth, off to one side, isolated and alone, is slate grey.

Take the meticulously crafted blue road.

Take the road colored in the universal sign for danger.

Take the silver road to the heavens.

Take the imperial red road.

Take the lonely grey road.

A vast and green ocean stretches out before you, the tide washing a vast spread of rose petals in and out. It is a sprawling and empty place, seemingly diminished, its energies weak in this particular context and configuration. At its most clichéd the underlying concept here is love, or at least emotion – a context Bidmead (and for that matter Nathan-Turner) find relatively foreign.

The one meaningful representative of the concept would seem to be Nyssa – an interesting problem of a companion. She is beloved by fandom, true, but it is difficult to escape the sense that this is primarily, if not purely, down to the fact that Sarah Sutton is something of a looker. But there is more to it than just that. Sutton is skilled enough as an actress, something that shows clearly here in the handful of emotional beats she gets. Clear enough also in *The Keeper of Traken*, where her final line, a choked and worried "Father? Where are you?" carries the entire emotional weight of the final scene. Here she gets a scene reacting in horror at what the Master has done to her – everything he has stripped away from her, including her entire world.

It is a strange thing. There is a pained sense of mourning to it. It's the only scene in the entire story where anyone seems particularly upset at the destruction of a large portion of the universe. And yet there is also a quiet dignity, a sense that she refuses to let the loss get to her now. There is a sense of mourning deferred, of a beautiful strength, of someone who will bury the dead later but has other things to do first. But there is also an awkwardness – a sense that Sutton is reacting in horror to a poorly written scene and trying to get something in it to work. The needed "later" never comes, and in future confrontations with the Master, Nyssa seems to have forgotten about the fact that he is responsible for the genocide of her people. This scene, as good as Sutton is in it, is a single spark of something that is painfully absent from the series in this era.

There are people who openly prefer the series in this era to the supposed silliness of the Graham Williams era. This is inscrutable. Whatever its problems, surely it's preferable to this amnesiac sociopathy. Surely an excess of an emotional core to a story is preferable to none whatsoever. It cannot be called a victory that the show is so bloody rational-minded that it forgets to find any emotional content in genocide, treating it as a purely intellectual exercise in thermodynamics.

The wind sweeps along this empty beach. Some day it will be inhabited. For now there is nothing to do here. Two roads lead onward – a dull and brown path lined with cactuses and an unsteady, perhaps even treacherous path marked in blue.

Take the prickly brown path.

Take the volatile blue path.

"Logopolis," taken literally, is a city of words. The mercurial, by definition, is connected to this, Hermes being defined in terms of communication. Words, then, are defined by their fluidity – they are the purest embodiment of quicksilver's Splendour. And yet each one is an emboitment, a solid box from which things may be built. "Block transfer" describes the mechanics of printing as much as anything.

Let us explore, then, the notion of Logopolis: a city of chanting monks who keep the universe running in secret. This is, implicitly, a Kabbalistic concept, referring back to the Tzadikim Nistarim, the Lamed Wufniks, righteous ones who, unknowingly, keep the cosmos in line. It is said that by necessity they do not even know who they are, that claiming to be a Wufnik is proof positive you are not one. Deep within the bowels of creation their secret language saves a world that has long ago fallen.

In what language do they chant? Why, in mathematics, of course. The nature of mathematics is intrinsically Platonic. No thing called a right angle exists in the world, atoms themselves being too imprecise to depict the contours of holy geometry. And yet we may speak of these fictitious objects and scrawl them in our imperfect hand, manipulating these symbols of a perfection beyond worldly matters. Mathematics is the language in which God wrote the universe. Fitting that the rim of a badge for mathematical excellence should turn out to be made of solar gold, that it should be capable of slaying the qlippothic decay of all things in and of itself. The symbols' meanings, inevitably, fit together better than they themselves do.

And yet Logopolis is also the least mercurial place in the universe. A place of fixed meanings and absolute things. It is at once the symbol that the Doctor has always represented and the symbol of his death. The very quicksilver that animates all things, that makes progress and motion up the tree possible, is also the slide that detaches symbol from meaning, that marks and ensures our fall. There is no real difference between quicksilver and putrefaction. All power and all things rest here amidst the splendor of these brilliant orange orchids, ever flowering and ever rotting. And yet the only thing we cannot do is rest in peace. We are compelled, despite the sanctity of this temple, to move on, to disturb it.

Three paths are open to us. The first is marked by a splendid red tower that seems to encapsulate all the glory that Logopolis promises. The second is jet black, and a chilling laughter echoes about it. The final is sea green and smells of perfume, winding past a single tree.

Take the path by the splendid tower.
Follow the chilling laughter.
Wander by the tree.

A purple glow lights everything around you. Silver-tinged fog floats across a wind-swept landscape, a city of shadows and myths, towering edifices of quartz and dust. It is not enough to say that you "see" here. Not with eyes, but with sensation itself, with thought and knowledge. These are the jasmine-scented realms of the interior eye.

We have always been here. Every word of this project has taken place in this space, the mental landscapes that comprise psychochronography. Still, incarnated here as an actual space, as dimensions to be strolled amidst, there is something uncanny about it. No. That phrasing, that structure, it does not apply here. There is not something uncanny about this space. Rather, this space is what the uncanny is about. A later critic, joined to the moment spawning this journey by a small footpath of time and symbolism, asserts that all of Doctor Who takes place under the bed. A child's bed, presumably, and thus a twin. A space of thirty-six by seventy-five inches, elevated perhaps a foot above the ground. A box-shaped space some nineteen cubic feet in size that contains the whole of Doctor Who.

Bigger on the inside, perhaps. The boxes formed in this place always are. The nature of ideaspace, that; a place where interior dimensions exceed exterior ones in every way. Imaginary spaces do not collapse or explode, they unravel, decohere, are dismantled. One dismantles them not by starting at the outside but at the very heart, by severing connections, collapsing possibilities into things. This is what is scariest about Doctor Who – the possibility of a closet with a phone on the outside. The possibility that it is only ink-stained paper, pulsing radio transmissions, hex codes and subroutines. That the gestalt does not exist.

The obvious example is, of course, the TARDIS, but over the course of Season Eighteen Bidmead manages another: the Charged Vacuum Emboitment. Let us unpack the term. The "charged vacuum" evokes the vacuum tube, a key component in early 20th century computers and, for that matter, televisions. In computing terms – obviously the terms most relevant to *Logopolis* – the vacuum tube is an individual switch, a single 0 or 1. But what of emboitment? A term from the French, it essentially means "putting inside a box." Most often spelled "emboitement," it refers specifically to a discredited belief in biology that a given organism contains within it the seeds of all future life, supposing a sort of infinite fractal geometry of life itself.

A Charged Vacuum Emboitment, then, like a Chronic Hysteresis, is a piece of technobabble that works linguistically. (Tat Wood, missing the point, describes this in terms of how Bidmead's Master tends "to give Victorian-style brand names to things like the Neuro-Muscular Constrictor," ignoring the way in which Bidmead proposes a universe in which names and function are inexorably linked. But names are a topic for elsewhere.) It is a computational atom – a single bit – that encloses an entire universe. It is, in other words, a metaphor not just for the TARDIS (itself, in any given story, a CVE) but for the underlying concept of the word "TARDIS" itself. It is the basic unit from which Doctor Who is built, functioning along the lunar logic that permeates this place whereby

any two spaces are linked not by their physical dimensions but by their relative ones – their associations – linked not across spatial regions but temporal ones. A CVE uses time and relative dimensions (with)in space.

This central truth emboited, serving as Foundation for our future ascent, we may continue. Three paths present themselves. To the left a shaft of sunlight strikes the purple ground, lighting silver to gold, seeming to provide this realm with its very energy and fuel, channeling the light that it reflects upwards. Straight ahead is a rope ladder, climbable but arduous. To the right is a pale blue path, lit by a single, solitary point of light.

Take the golden path of light.
Climb the rope ladder.
Take the pale blue path.

The traditional image is of a man walking blindly towards a cliff, but let's take a simpler image. The nothingness out of which everything emerges. That is the only thing that can predate this. Only one thing that comes before a magic box and its madman. A hiss of tape loop, a synthesized sting, or perhaps a wheezing, groaning sound. It doesn't matter. In all renditions the effect is the same.

A blank screen. A flash of light. The beginning. Whether a starfield, a time tunnel, or a blaze of howlaround, it is the one immortal part of the show which predates and prefigures its concept.

Continue.

The very road itself thunders:

"There are only two magic tricks. You either make something appear or make something disappear. You put it in the box or you take it out.

A flick of the pen and Tom Baker disappears. Another and the future of the show appears. One flick and the universe blinks out of existence – as easy as that, as easy as typing the words 'the universe blinks out of existence' and it does just that. Another brings a new man, smiling, young, an entire future and possibility. The Doctor flings a symbol into the universe and, in that action alone, saves it.

And if you ask where the social progress is, how this reaches down to Toxteth and confronts the festering horrors of the world, consider this and this alone: a dead magician weaves no alchemy. Ascend to the stars, if only to make the return to earth possible later."

There is a flash of pure, white light – an inrush of Hydrogen. You have arrived.

Continue.

The road is lit by the purest silver moonlight and seems to stretch over a vast chasm. The light is pulsing, fading in and out with a familiar wheezing, groaning sound. Amidst the undulations you hear a voice, faint and beautiful:

"In some conceptions I, marked (inevitably) as the sacred feminine for my connection to the moon, am taken to be the embodiment of gestation. In those accounts of the Tarot based on a narrative structure this card marks the long and silent ages of the universe (a prospect that becomes threatening in the more overtly lunar card) and the nurturing principle that slowly advanced towards life. The universe's womb.

In the broader context the womb is but another emboitment. Consider why the TARDIS is feminine. The most straightforward answer is that ships are always feminine, but this obscures the real answer. A ship, after all, is but a safe, enclosing space that carries us through a journey. The womb is a sound enough metaphor. Within me the mercurial force gestates, prepares itself and is born out, again and again. If the Doctor is what acts within a story then I am what prepares him, what allows him to act. Any moment that is prepared for is prepared by me.

Yet in *Logopolis* my dimensions unravel. It is not merely the intrusion of a qlippothic womb into my own dimensions that causes this. I am mapped – computations are applied to me, an attempt is made to model me in fixed Newtonian sleep and mathematics. An emboitment and block transfer computation are, in point of fact, opposed – necessarily so. An emboitment's role is to open the system – to bleed the entropy from this system into others and to restore my generative function to the cosmos. But block transfer computation collapses possibility and otherness into the rigid markedness of numbers and perfectly defined signifiers.

This is not to say that what is revealed within *Logopolis* is false. Rather it is that what is revealed in *Logopolis* must be contradicted, negated, written further and further upon. Death and meaning are synonymous, and by defining the TARDIS, she shrinks away to nothingness."

The light fades out, the wind dies down, and you are alone in a silent, silver world.

Continue.

The figure is, of course, feminine. But at these heights it is difficult to discern more. These are the realms of pure archetype. There is no analogy, no character within a story quite equivalent to this. She exceeds representation – her interior dimensions always too large to contain, even in a momentary illusion. There is just the blue of an empty sky, the faint smell of rose and sandalwood, and this message:

"What might be said to be produced by this? The implications of *Logopolis* are never really explored again. Even Craig Hinton, as continuity-mad a writer as has ever penned a Doctor Who book, only flits into concern about it. Something about this story is too big to follow up on. Even those who love its ideas only dance around them.

In another sense all of Doctor Who follows from this. The emboitment, as must already be clear, is the fundamental metaphor of Doctor Who. Regeneration, even from a star of Tom Baker's magnitude, is what defines the show's survival. The bounty offered by *Logopolis* is infinite.

It is telling that the CVE that saves creation is flung into Cassiopeia, the constellation representing a queen, tied to a chair and placed in the heavens, all because she claimed a beauty greater than the daughters of the gods. This myth is emboited in Kassia of Traken, who is lashed to a chair and tethered to the Source, only to vanish as she's replaced by the Melkur, an emboitment for the Master. She becomes negative space. A personified dramatization of what happens in *Logoplis*.

An emboitment within a woman. The biological metaphors are clear enough. But the CVE is an exit vent for the universe. She does not produce or give birth. Instead, she expels. Cassiopeia is not the point at which life enters our universe, but rather our universe's womb, pushing the homunculus out into the next."

Then silence.

Continue.

A man sits upon a throne. His garb is familiar – red coat, scarf – but the colors more vibrant, the burgundy having become a vibrant scarlet, the scarf now adorned with rubies. A crown of curls sits atop his head. He speaks:

"The problem with driving Tom Baker off of the program – and let's make no mistake, that is more or less exactly what John Nathan-Turner set out to do when taking over Doctor Who – is one of dynamism. Whatever might be said of Baker's uncharitable attitudes towards his fellow actors, his screen-hogging tendencies, or his tendency to favor plot elements that flatter him and allow him to be adored, he was always capable of getting away with it by the simple virtue of the fact that it was fun to watch him. From his first appearance this was true. Even here, weary and nearing death, it is true.

Consider that. It is difficult to think of any Doctor whose first and last appearances are as wildly different as *Robot* and *Logopolis* are. Even Hartnell, who plays a completely different character by *The Tenth Planet* than he did in *An Unearthly Child*, doesn't preside over such a radical reconceptualization of what the show is as Baker has. *Robot*, essentially a Jon Pertwee story with a new lead, and *Logopolis* have virtually nothing save for the lead actors in common. It is not that any one of the seven seasons was in and of itself a particularly momentous change, but rather that anyone who serves under four producers and four script editors and who works in one part for seven years is going to see the show change significantly.

And yet so much of what was said in the essay on *Robot* still applies. The most overwhelming thing about Baker, even subdued and cranky, is his charm and presence, the way his very presence on the screen deforms everything around him. He is larger than life, and compacted into a television screen he scrapes endlessly at its edges, demanding to be set free. Little on television, before or since, has compared with the sheer force of his performance. Not emotional force, creative force, intellectual force, but raw force – an unbridled sense of being that crackles like fire."

Awed, you find yourself forced to your knees. The man smiles a big, toothy grin, and waves you on your way.

Continue.

The path winds its way through the sky until you come to a library. Various books line the shelf – a "Programme Guide" by Jean-Marc Lofficier, *The Gallifrey Chronicles* by John Peel, Lance Parkin's *AHistory*, and other thorough examinations of the canon of the universe. A plaque turns to you, and a humanoid face begins speaking.

"Doctor Who's anarchist spirit, much vaunted both here and elsewhere, is a complex thing. We are too quick to reduce anarchism to a unitary concept, to act as though there is only one form of it. This form naturally becomes its most extreme form, leaving anarchism to be equated straightforwardly with a sort of nihilism – a rejection of all law. It is impossible to take the series as anarchistic in this sense. For all that the Doctor tears down authority, for all that the structure of the series declines all effort to lock it into a rigid and fixed continuity and canon, the series retains some sense of law, some sense of a universal beyond the mere alchemical injunction: solve.

This is why Bidmead's science-minded approach is so compatible with the series. His desire to build worlds out of rules that the Doctor would interact with was always the perfect match. The Doctor is a Victorian magician, bound up in past and memory and age. A Victorian anarchist is still defined endlessly in relation to a society of law and order. And it is through Bidmead and the rise of play within a system – the idea that anarchism is not generated by fighting against the law but by the manipulation and play within its gaps – that the anarchist spirit of Doctor Who in point of fact reaches its apex. Put simply, *Logopolis* declares that without periodic rules-breaking the entire system will dissolve and we will all die."

The face turns away, and the shadows begin to grow menacingly long. You move on.

Continue.

A man in black lurks unsettlingly in the orchid bushes along this path. You glare at him, and he sheepishly emerges. For a moment, you think you see someone else in the bushes with him, but as he sees your eyes peering into them, he speaks to distract you:

"Those who seek to write slash fiction about the classic series of Doctor Who are somewhat bereft of options due to the frequency with which there is no second male character and the fact that the Doctor is usually a somewhat sexless character. When he tips into wholly sexless – the William Hartnell era, for instance – slash becomes impossible. If one ignores the vast and limitless possibilities within the UNIT era one is essentially left with Jamie/Ben (boring), Doctor/Ben (just doesn't work), Doctor/Jamie (compelling, actually), Doctor/Adric (creepy), Doctor/Turlough (just too easy, frankly), and, of course, Doctor/Master.

This latter pairing, implicit amidst the slash festival that is the UNIT era, takes on new significance under the Ainley Master. Properly this begins in full with Davison, the most slash-friendly Doctor of the classic series, but it's not like Davison exudes a burning need to get it on with every single male he appears on camera with. Whereas the very act of putting Anthony Ainley onscreen with a male co-star strikes the slash fiction harp. (The best, of course, is when he has Adric in bondage in *Castrovalva*. Good lord.)

Part of this is the arrival of John Nathan-Turner, under whom the show becomes somewhat more prone to a camp sensibility. The Master ends up being the chief beneficiary of it, but let's face it, it's all over the place. Even still, Anthony Ainley's capacity for camp is a thing of utter splendor. And the result is that the latent slash pairing underlying Doctor Who suddenly kicks into high gear.

The archetypal slash pairing is based on the existence of a clear contrast coupled with a close emotional bond. Given that the standard example is Kirk and Spock, this almost doesn't even need elucidation. He's impulsive and rash, he's cold and logical, and yet despite that something glues them together. What could it possibly be? Clearly their need to rip each other's uniforms off and shag like bunnies. This logic animates the two big Doctor Who slash pairings equally well: Doctor/Brigadier, and this. The real reason the Doctor and the Master hate each other is that they love each other too much. And thus reams of sadomasochistic reaming follow.

What is crucial to note is that the following generated by this, erm, subtext is central to the show's survival. The fact of the matter is that gay fandom kept Doctor Who alive. The triumverate of Russell T. Davies, Phil Collinson, and Julie Gardner meant that Doctor Who was unapologetically run by two gay men and a slash fanatic. And, if I may be so bold, there will come a time when Tennant/Simm slashers run the asylum as well."

He creeps back into the bushes. Perhaps unnerved, perhaps aroused, you move on.

Continue.

There is a triumphant roar. The world blurs, and the air whips past your ears. You are moving terribly fast. In your ears, the howlarounding wind proclaims:

"As one approaches a more and more fevered pitch, as the ideas that are spun become more complex and intriguing; as the scope of the story and the argument expands, there becomes an added pressure to go further. The phrase 'more exciting than ever before' and 'a longer entry than ever before' become increasingly appealing. And so even when you do not mean for your little game to casually unravel the structure of the universe and slaughter billions or to be longer than the entry you swore you were never going to be longer than, well, these things happen.

The risk, of course, is disappearing up your own ass. Once your sole concern becomes topping yourself, you start to lose all sense of engagement with anything outside yourself. The purpose becomes an endless sifting through your own legacy. The further one ascends to the heights of divinity the more it becomes easy to forget the fact that underneath all of the wordplay and emboitments is a society that is being ripped apart. Forgetting completely about Toxteth is no different from its 'managed decline.'

This does not mean we ought not climb higher. It doesn't even lessen the imperative that we do. But the gravity – the need to remain clinging to the road we circle – to return to Earth – exists and is wholly real."

Slowly the chariot draws to a stop.

Continue.

Among the sunflowers a nude blonde woman cavorts lasciviously with a Tharil. Or possibly a Dalek. Amidst her fevered cries of passion comes this insight:

"Implicit in the transition between these two realms and their insights is the transition between two basic models of what television is. In one, Doctor Who is something that airs as part of a whole-family-centered Saturday evening lineup. In this manifestation it has to appeal to the entire family. This does not necessarily mean the cynical quadrant-targeting that is implied in that. But it does mean the consideration of multiple audiences, both with multiple levels of sophistication and multiple interests. So, for instance, in my day the producers, who came from a soap opera background, knew to thread in multiple characters with long-running stories that rewarded long-time viewers not in the sense of recognizing the name of an alien planet but in the sense of getting them to care about the characters and invest in them.

In other words, it's not that you need a love story to hook women, but that straightforward sci-fi adventure, even quasi-mystical and densely poetic sci-fi adventure, isn't Saturday audience material. Other timeslots exist for single-audience targeted shows. For instance, there's something like *Coronation Street*, which airs twice a week and is expressly designed for a more obsessive sort of viewing. And if you want to take a sort of single-audience approach like that then a structure along those lines might serve you well."

She smiles delightedly, and you realize that you had completely misread the situation. There was no lascivious cavortation. Merely an innocent wrestling match between woman and lion. How silly of you.

Continue.

A figure clad in white stands alone on a cliff of peridot, his voice booming down:

"The homunculus is a theory in which the egg or sperm were believed to contain a full human inside of them that developed out. A specific version of emboitment, in other words. But what, then, do we make of regeneration? Taken in its original quasi-conception as the transition from Hartnell to Troughton it is only incidentally a homunculus theory. Troughton replaces Hartnell. Similarly, there is no suggestion of a homunculus in *The War Games*, where Troughton is offered the opportunity to select his face. Pertwee's transition into Baker is more interesting – no homunculus of Baker appears, but the presence of Cho-Je suggests a different approach to regeneration in which the future self is projected by the existing self.

In a real sense, then, Cho-Je, in whose footsteps the Watcher clearly follows, is a homunculus and an emboitment himself. The future of the Doctor is quasi-literally embedded in his past. And yet they miss a trick in not having the Watcher be played by Peter Davison. This would be perfectly possible – they kept the Watcher from speaking in part so that Ainley (who got a credit due to his laughing in the first two parts) appeared to plausibly be the Watcher. The same trick could be accomplished with Davison. He could even speak and then be masked with an anagram – a trick they pick up for the Master starting in the next story.

But this is not done. The reasons are no doubt pedestrian – Davison would cost too much and it would risk giving the game away. But the textual implications are substantive. The future incarnations of the Doctor are emboited within him, but also indeterminate. They are at once inevitable and undefined, an eternity of the show that follows inexorably from what is on screen but is not implied in any certain form."

His point made, he recedes into the shadows atop the cliff.

Continue.

A massive oak tree stands before you with a large and slowly rotating wheel affixed to it. There are several points at which you can climb aboard. Tentatively, you do so.

On one level, this act serves as a metaphor for the entirety of this journey. Of course it does. That's the point of everything here. But this seems to exemplify everything – the way in which the ascent of new ideas and the casting down of old ones are inexorably linked, the way in which every idea and motion of the program must, in time, go from one to the other.

More broadly it is a metaphor for what lies ahead – the choppy waters of sublimity and ridiculousness that the program will navigate. The swings from brilliance to awfulness soon begin to outdo the Williams era in their shocking ludicrousness. It is difficult to even express what it is like to watch a show that goes from *Earthshock* to *Time-Flight* or from *Arc of Infinity* to *Snakedance*, little yet one that follows *The Caves of Androzani* with *The Twin Dilemma*.

But lest this wheel be taken entirely as a symbol of instability, consider also this – the wheel is fashioned upon an oak tree. The rising and falling can on the one hand be taken as chaos, but on the other hand the sheer rhythmic pattern of it reflects a higher order. Doctor Who will always be great. Doctor Who will always be terrible. Often it will be both at once. Eighteen years in, surviving all that it has survived, the whole has long since outstripped its parts. The map is not the territory, and the motion up and down is not the wheel.

The wheel spins on.

Continue.

A man with curly hair, goatee, and moustache sits, obsessively moving beans about a scale. He looks up at you and smiles with forced gregariousness:

"Doctor Who is now a finely tuned television event. Season Eighteen is not notable primarily for building thematically towards a payoff – Bidmead's conceptions of E-Space and the CVE aren't really coherent enough to do that. What is more significant is the televisual grammar: the fact that every two stories a new event takes place. First the new take on the series launches. Then a new companion. Then Romana's departure (and the premiere of the second half of the series) and finally the regeneration.

This structure is important, keeping Doctor Who as it does within a firm grammar. Much as later producers may distance themselves from my era, they too pick up this structure: look at how, once the initial rush of a new series of Doctor Who fades, five weeks in Davies staggers out the Daleks, the debut of a new companion, and the start of the finale over three week segments. Or how Moffat front-loads his Dalek story, the return of River Song and the Weeping Angels into the first month of his tenure to keep viewers.

The problem with my era cannot be said to be my chasing of ratings. I'm a television producer. Of course I chase ratings. That's the job of television – to make things that people like. It's not even that I attempted that by catering to a least common denominator. Complex and intelligent stories exist in nearly every season I produced. As long as my fine adjustments – my moves and events to keep the balls in the air and keep drawing in viewers – remain sensible and well-advised the show will remain successful. The question is merely whether I can keep the balls in the air and continue coming up with a new innovation every few weeks.

Can I? Stay tuned."

Continue.

There is a cooling breeze blowing along the path, a humid sea air tinged with lotus and honey-like myrrh. As you approach the tree that you had seen in the distance there is also, you realize, a man hanging upside-down from it, the tails of his scarf swaying slowly in the breeze:

"There is a ritual underlying this image based around a spiritual journey and metaphoric death. In the course of his suspension and death the seeker gains some visions and insights, whether from the qlippothic forces of Mondas, the intrusion of continuity and naming, or agonized wanderings in the vortex. Or, in my case, a flashback sequence.

First mocked by my enemies, then called for my by friends, the purpose seems more to define what is lost than to look ahead. The villains skew from my supposed glory days – the Hinchcliffe era augmented by two from the later Williams years. My friend echoes the production of the show and not emotion: Romana appears twice, once for each incarnation in which I knew her. The purpose is overtly to mourn me, a mourning that precedes the loss, precedes even my last line. It is narcissism, but whose? The images predate those creating the show, whereas my own narcissism has been blocked and obscured throughout this story and indeed this season.

No, the narcissist in the equation is in fact the viewer – the watcher, if you will. The paratext marks this not as an event that happens to characters, but rather as one that happens to the audience, to the cultural institution that is Doctor Who. This event declares an end to the Tom Baker era and in the process declares, chillingly and for the first time, that this is now the sort of show concerned with its own historical legacy."

The man falls silent and seems as still as the grave. You stay for a short time, enjoying the cool breeze, and then continue.

Continue.

The brown path seems to wind through an endless desert. As you walk you find yourself losing track of where you are or what you seek, lost in the agonizing eternity of the now. In the distance you see an old man animated by a manic and familiar energy, but more tired now, slowed by age. You open your mouth to ask for directions, but he treads on your line and steals the scene:

"Tom Baker's post-Doctor Who career is troubling. It is not, to be fair, an easy role to leave. Typecasting abounds, hence the fabled Troughton rule (though only Davison followed the rule by choice). Doubly so when you are, by your own admission, not so much an actor as a performer. Baker found considerable voice work after Doctor Who, but it was years until the part he was known for had receded sufficiently into the past that he could be cast on the basis of nostalgia for it instead of being not cast on the basis of memory of it.

The result is awkward. For years Baker was the sticky wicket when it came to reunions. He remained absent in The Five Doctors, his desire (whether based on a real need or a perceived need) to frame the 30th Anniversary special around his Doctor with the others in cameo roles largely derailed that project, he for years did not appear on stage with other Doctors at conventions, and was the one who didn't do audios for the longest time. His VHS documentary special *The Tom Baker Years* was a clip show that gave every impression of being curated so as to require the least possible time investment from Baker himself. There was a constant sense of Baker trying to distance himself from the part.

But then, when you are less an actor than a performer and have been typecast in a role, the result is necessarily awkward. In all of this there is an uncomfortable sense that anything that can fairly be called Tom Baker has dropped out of the equation, that his very self was eaten by the part. Taken in this context, much becomes clearer about his tenure – his prickliness and difficulty to work with become less the bitchiness of an egotistical star and more the tragic consequence of someone realizing the enormous gravity the role asserts, someone trying desperately to claw a self out of the voluminous reaches of the scarf. His later reluctance to return to the part becomes an understandable need to maintain the fragile existence he had separate from his definitive role.

And it is not until he becomes the man who was the Fourth Doctor and not simply the Fourth Doctor that he could return to Earth – not until David Tennant finally relieved him of the burden of being the most popular Doctor, not until he had a career separate from the role. More than any other actor to play the part, it seems, Tom Baker gave his life to the role. Let us say little more than that it is good to know that, at last, he seems to have gotten it back."

The man smiles a toothy and familiar grin, and points ahead. At once the way is clear. The path, which seemed at first to be about loss, is revealed, as ever, to be about rebirth. Smiling yourself, you hurry on.

Continue.

The ladder is yellowed and old, rickety and hard to climb. For a moment you doubt your ability, consider scurrying back down to the lunar foundation, but the nature of ascent precludes it. You must work your way up, slow and methodical. An unearthly child, possibly a futuristic entertainment coordinator, possibly a Victorian governess, or maybe just a schoolteacher, speaks:

"How do you turn lead into gold? It has been said that the solution to the problem of the alchemists is material social progress. But this material progress is a slow refining – an incremental change. If we treat gold as perfection then this becomes the process by which it is made. By which it is tempered, in some accounts. In others, it is simply called art. The Problem of Susan never resolves, but is instead slowly chipped away at, each iteration shaving away the mistakes of the previous to reveal new errors and flaws that must be hammered out.

Progression towards utopia is impossible. And yet the utopian image lingers on. The perfect companion who, by haunting the narrative, always destroys the one that is there, a sacrifice to bring the ghost around. She never comes. You will climb forever, always failing to fix it, always having another rung, another impurity to be hammered out. Another bug in the program for which the exterminators must be called.

Romana was too strong a Doctor surrogate, so instead we replace her with a young, brash, impulsive and flawed boy. But this just turns out to be the Doctor, only annoying, so in time he must go, especially when the trait that defines him – that he is the imperfect hero – is absorbed into the Doctor.

The female companion is always too docile, so we make a supposed mouth on legs, one who will shout and cajole and never back down. But the emboitment of worms proves, inevitably, bigger on the inside. Along with a troubling sexist discourse of how she is too uppity and complains too much (never mind the utter justice of her complaints – her Aunt was murdered and she was swept into life-threatening adventures because she got a flat tire on the wrong stretch of road; she did not ask to fall out of the world) there is a problem of undermining. With Tegan present, the show is not about the joys of seeing the universe. But then, it wasn't to begin with. This is a puzzling aspect of art. The same flaws reiterate in new forms throughout the climb.

Still other times we make progress through failed reiteration. The noble bearing of Romana seemed interesting. Create a new noble genius, then, who is less a Doctor surrogate. A scientist, yes, but in a more limited scope. She retains Romana's allure, but reveals the real problem with Romana – the same problem that existed with the Doctor: an emotionless detachment.

In time these flaws too are hammered away. The climb extends infinitely. Progress, achingly slow, is made."

Slowly, inexorably, silver gives way to gold.

Continue.

Amidst the blackness there is a musky smell and a cackling laughter. There is an unnerving sense that you are not alone, though there is nobody here. The laughter seems utterly distant, marking not a presence but an absence. And yet the air is stifling, sticky and hot. The laughter echoes, turning cacophonous, like an ever-present maddening drumbeat. Between the pulses you can just make out a voice:

"What am I at this point? Originally the doppelgänger of the Doctor, intended to be revealed as his id, in many ways the same mind as him, my return here is clouded. The ostensible logic is to bring something familiar to help ease the transition of the regeneration. In that regard, perhaps, a character who hasn't made a significant appearance in eight years is an odd choice. But there are larger problems. When last I made my regular appearance, as discussed at the time, I suffered from a problem of symmetry. Meant as a counterpart to the Doctor I could not function once the Doctor became too ontologically determined. Once I was facing down Pertwee in his prime, the dashing, flawless action hero, I was nothing more than a comedy bumbler doomed to abject but audience-pleasing failure.

These problems have only grown worse. Now we have the single most star-powered Doctor in the series' history. I can wipe out half the universe and it still doesn't even register as a blip against him falling off a radio telescope. A radio telescope! Even that is in my image – it's where I made my debut. A primal, howling scene of my creation, and I'm completely upstaged by Tom Baker long after he's even given up trying to act.

Instead my nature has become libidinous. Not just on my own terms, as I seem to exist less to fulfill a definable scheme and more for the sake of generating exceedingly outlandish quadruple-crosses and traps within traps – to generate complexity for its own sake. And within the program's instincts as well. I am the embodiment of the temptation to return to its past, the temptation to redo, to revisit, to repeat. I am the primary symptom of a show attempting to live up to a memory. I am an event marked by fiat, not because the event matters, but because it matters that there be an event here, now, in this spot."

His grandstanding monologue degenerates into more tiresome cackling, or perhaps just gets lost amidst the drums, forgotten, abandoned, dare I say it, boring.

Continue.

You take one step towards the tower and there is a crack of lightning. The tower explodes, its rubble raining down upon you. Pinned beneath, you see amidst the smoldering wreckage above a single figure clinging desperately to a last cable. He hangs for a time, and speaks:

"Mercury is destructive. The anarchic must shatter all order. To begrudge this, to object, to scream and rage against the existence of the end is to miss the point spectacularly. Everything you love about Doctor Who must necessarily be destroyed, burnt forcibly out of it, scoured mercilessly so that the future may happen.

And yet it is impossible to treat this as anything short of painful. Watch as the most beloved of Doctors lingers, swings awkwardly, clings for a moment to hope, then plummets. Watch his broken body glow and change. There is always something, in the classic series, grotesque about the first shot of the new Doctor. In this case his smile, reassuring and even pleasant in every other shot Davison appears in, is instead a smug mockery. You've lost Tom Baker. Ha ha."

(There is a truth to it. No matter how it is framed, no matter how it is conceptualized, no matter how it is prepared for, the sense of shattering, epic loss is inescapable. For all that I love this story and its ideas, it is painful to watch – one I actively dreaded getting on VHS. I did not want to see it. There is a crushing brutality to it, still, to this day. It's not the same one that permeates *The Caves of Androzani* – that sense of a last hurrah before the bad times begin. I love Davison's Doctor. But the sheer weight of the loss still hurts.)

His fingers slip from the cable, and he plummets down, landing with a sickening crack. Slowly, painfully, you climb from the rubble. Unable to bear the thought of looking at his surely crushed and broken body, you move on.

Continue.

You can barely make out the road, lit as it is by a single distant point of light. The nature of the light is obscure, not from its physical distance but its temporal distance. A panama hat, perhaps, or a leather jacket, a pair of trainers, a bowtie. Some *thing* that is not yet, yet must be approached. The future. Its voice is soothing, providing a comfortable order even as you feel your way tentatively along the sky-blue glass of this path:

"For so long, this section of the landscape could be read only as apocalyptic. The slow and winding path to inevitable decline. This cannot be erased. We are necessarily marking the days to the show's death. The first errors and missteps have already arrived, and more papercuts will continue to pile up until at last the light goes out.

Except that the light does not go out. The relationship between death and birth in Doctor Who has always been complex, and grows even moreso. A march towards death? Perhaps, but also a march towards resurrection. Every papercut is counterbalanced by a step towards the future, which exerts its ordering presence and guiding light upon an unfamiliar past. The future turns the past into a lie, making the random messiness of history into an ordered narrative. Disconnected circumstances – Hofstadter, The ZX81, the Choose Your Own Adventure books, Ted Nelson – become culture and a movement. And yet the glue that falsely binds these events together is also memory, without which the events would be lost completely to the blackness.

As above, so below. The chain of circumstances that fragments the law holding the universe together is the very same chain that ensures its continuation."

Your walk continues in serene silence. Eventually, perhaps, you arrive. Perhaps not.

Continue.

A pungent and smoky odor drifts along the wan and sickly lit path. Vine-wrapped stonework is faintly visible in the distance, off the path. There is a sound of chittering insects, ancient denizens of some precambrian hell. A voice echoes, at once familiar and utterly alien:

"All things that were are dead now, slain out of reason and necessity. And yet you lust for their return. To dream of the future and to remember the past are always one, but the past that is remembered is not the past. I am what breeds in the gaps of those memories. The accreted dogmas and beliefs in what the show was, the lost magic of Doctor Who, the insistence that the sole true future of the show is held in memory, these things nourish and feed me. I am the yellowfaced Chinamen smoking the opium you breathe in, the Mon(grel)oids in moptops, the sociopathic abscesses obscured by your dreams of a glorious past. In darkness alone can a solitary point of light be god. Here alone can single vision spin a simulacrum of a world. The past carbonizes away, decays to shale and oil. And yet you lust for Silurian seas and ancient and worshipful laws.

Am I ascendant or in decline? The wizard who opposes magic tears away at me, and yet I lurk, soon to emerge, soon to at last control this show. For now I bide my time, and enumerate the heresies:

• Why does Nyssa, who previously showed no particular awareness of the TARDIS, now have the capacity to send a message to it, to toll the bell for the Doctor?

• Why does the Watcher appear here and here alone of all of the Doctor's regenerations?

• What happened to the rules about TARDISes materializing within one another? And what the hell is the Doctor thinking with his flushing out the TARDIS scheme?

• Is the Master not chaotic even as motiveless malignancies go?

• Why is Logopolis mirroring late 20th century Earth technology for their brilliant plan to save the universe?

• Where are the Guardians? Or the Time Lords?

• Why does the Doctor think that his method of dealing with the police is remotely sensible?

• How exactly does the Doctor plan on perfectly modeling the measurements of a Police Box that is obviously of a different design from the one the TARDIS looks like?

• Why does shrinking the exterior of the TARDIS affect the interior? It's already bigger on the inside.

• Why is the Watcher willing to send the Doctor to Logopolis when doing so obliterates a large swath of the universe, including inhabited worlds? And why is this never mentioned again?"

Her screeching enumerations of faults drive you hurriedly down the long and dark path. Slowly her voice fades, at first into some banal boy band. A last wisp of lyrics – something about finding heaven and the wings of love – and the voice goes silent at last.

Continue.

Everything is gold, transcendent, radiant, burningly beautiful. A dawn that is brighter than roses, cinnamon-swirled and radiant. Amidst the glow is a silhouette of a babe swaddled in a cricket suit, sucking upon the teat of a stalk of celery. He speaks:

"I am prepared for.

Every regeneration is necessarily a shift away from the excesses of the previous. On a basic level this leads to, within any given chain of three or four Doctors, a sort of toggling. 1-4 are roughly "Serious/Funny/Serious/Funny." 4-6 are roughly "Bombastic/Restrained/Bombastic." But over a longer period there are more significant drifts. Negation of negation does not return to the original. This is progress – an endless turning back that does not quite retrace the past. Here, seven years on from the last new Doctor, the shift is one of the two most seismic in the series' history.

Baker's Doctor was defined by his invulnerability. Throughout his entire tenure there is not a single story that hinges on him as a character – on his turmoil, weakness, or dramatic investment. He is purely a force of nature, possessing no interior dimensions to speak of. That, then, is what I react against. The whole of *Logopolis* denotes this and this specifically. A story about the Doctor's doom, at no point anywhere in it does the Doctor react to his own doom beyond the pragmatic. The Doctor's reactions to his doom are wholly absent. When Lawrence Miles speaks of the crystalline silence permeating this story, this, more than anything, is what makes it. It is a story about a dying man who at no point shows any sign of being conflicted by this.

The result is necessarily the introduction of subjectivity to the Doctor. Or, rather, the centralizing of it. The Doctor has been subjective before – most obviously in *Planet of the Spiders* – but now he is in part defined by it. Defined by the fact that he is not imperious and invulnerable, but instead a potentially weak man who nevertheless remains strong. And given the nature of how the endless negation of regeneration slowly drifts, this sort of change cannot be erased. This is the last story in which the Doctor is wholly other, and it is one that necessarily introduces the idea of the Doctor as an emotional protagonist instead of merely a plot one."

With that he falls silent, the act of birth not being commensurate with the act of life. He will speak more later.

Continue.

Amidst the searing heat of futurity and the stark and crimson blaze a man, clad also in red, burns in radiant light. From within this inferno he speaks thusly:

"The end, by definition, is prepared for. All things, by Aristotelean principle, prepare for the end. If anything the end is over-prepared for, laden with excessive symbols and preparations. A key concept, for instance, is the end of the Age of Osiris – an age represented by the dying and reborn solar god – and the beginning of the Age of Horus. Consider the scattered markings of the past implying that this marks a final regeneration – the literal end of the creature defined by rebirth and the moving into something new. Consider also the presence of the Master, now a creature not of rebirth but of something else, the threat that he shall now overtake the very universe itself. 'Peoples of the universe, please attend carefully.' The end is littered with symbolic misfires, signifying landmines threatening to detonate any path. Harry, I'm standing on a signifier.

That the point where I would cease to be the Doctor would someday come is inevitable. The inevitability of Tom Baker's physical death, the sun's expanding to a red giant, and the heat death of the universe conspire to ensure that at some point I necessarily must cease. Every breath and action I take necessarily moves me closer to that point. What is less clear is that there is a successor. From my first breath I was the definite article. Designed to be beloved and cherished, the leading man par excellence. For seven years I walked in eternity. Nearly half of the show's existence to this point. Why bother with a nineteenth season? It's been a good run. I can't be topped. Free up the budget for a new idea. Creative destruction, I believe it's called.

By rights this should be triumphant. A greatest hits compilation followed by a tragic last stand. Perhaps a maudlin 'reward' in which I visit past companions. How is dear Sarah Jane getting on? Pull out all the stops and then go. No point in continuing.

This, of course, is the great triumph of Nathan-Turner. Whatever his later failings, the fact is that almost any route through this story should have been the end of the show. That there are eight more seasons at all is astonishing. And a show that ends here is not immortal. Not one that returns. Gets reimagined, perhaps – plundered and rewritten into something else. But not returns. In this regard the preparations for this episode, the way in which this specific regeneration is built to, are a lynchpin. *Logopolis* is one of the few stories that simply cannot be excised from the history of Doctor Who – that it is impossible to imagine the show without. The decision to make the end a whimper and not a bang. The decision to, over the course of a season, strip away my star power and leading man charisma, to push me to the margins of my own show, to replace the entire artifice I stood upon with squabbling and unfamiliar kids, to kill my show off before killing me off.

That is the preparation."

The man immolates, gone, at least for now. The road continues forward as the searing red tempers, cools, fades ahead to orange.

Continue.

There is a blast of sulphurous air as the world goes black. A fear that crawls like a serpent up from your gut, a sense that these things are too large for one mind to grasp. You turn to go back, to curl up within the soft embrace of Thatcherite barbarism instead of facing this. The road back has vanished however. The crocodile's head yawns. Slowly, an order becomes clear. Not a crocodile head but the head of a snake, trodden beneath the feet of a woman of radiant beauty, nude and fluidly still. The snake winds its way around her, undulating serenely. They speak:

"A mystical tradition within Judaism based upon numerological contemplation of the Hebrew language, the Kabbalah as a term embraces many doctrines and traditions. In European Judaism it was formalized in the Middle Ages. Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain at the hands of the Inquisition, Judaism exhibited the inevitable uptick in eschatology and attempts to figure out when that Messiah thing was going to show up became popular. The result was a turn back towards the mysticism of the Kabbalah. These efforts came to merge with the syncretic urges of Renaissance mysticism to form the bastardized occult version of the concept.

In this understanding the Kabbalah provides a Tree of Life comprised of ten Sephiroth linked by twenty-two paths each represented by the Major Arcana of the Tarot. This tree comprises a complete map of creation – a diagram of the order of all things. Both the lowest and highest Sephira, Kether, represents the pure unity of the divine, and from it, down the lightning path, flows the divine until it reaches Malkuth, the Kingdom, in which it takes on its material form."

Or at least, you think that's what they say. Two voices overlapping and all. It's a bit unclear. It might have been something more like:

"Edward Packard's *The Cave of Time*, the first of the Choose Your Own Adventure series, came out in 1979. An overtly analog and literary form, it nevertheless tied in with the burgeoning interest in computers characteristic of the period. It is a case in which a variety of influences, all distinct in their own right, combined within the zeitgeist to form a culture that was inexorably clear to those within it. Packard was not a computer scientist and had no immediate connections to Douglas Hofstadter's massively popular *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Hofstadter, in turn, was not directly connected with Ted Nelson's Project Xanadu, and cites Computer Lib/Dream Machines not at all in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. And none were among the generation raised on the Sinclair ZX81, the BBC Micro, or, in the US, the Commodore 64 and Apple II.

But to be alive in the 1980s was to be intimately aware of all of these. The idea of structure was resurgent, but not in the stark and modernist sense of design. Rather, structure was a source of playfulness. It's not that the ideas were new. Rather, it was their confluence – the fact that all of this was immediately prevalent in mass culture. This is in many ways the birth of postmodernism as a cultural force – the point where we all realized that rules, law, and language itself were just jungle gyms waiting to be climbed and hung upside down from. That the map, while not the territory, is still a territory, inexorably connected to its

object, endlessly explorable."

It is difficult to say. The din and stink of sulphur drives you on up the road. In time the voices fade, and you realize the pitch blackness of the vast and empty space has given way to a crackling purple glow.

Continue.

1It is stark white and so very bright here at the summit. There is simply light, and oneness, and completion. This is the void, and it is everything.

Nothing follows this. But out of nothing can come anything. In one story Doctor Who is built up to the heavens itself and then leveled back down. These heights are not miles from Toxteth and Thatcher, from the Kingdom that the Crown rules above, but aeons away – distant in ways that transcend the very ideas of space and time. No matter. Sometimes the only escape we have from the world is dreams, whether it be the world of schoolyard bullies or of Tories. Sometimes all we can do in the face of a growing darkness is retreat into a realm of silly and daft ideas and watch as they inexorably spin their way into more.

Doctor Who can't fight Thatcher. It can't stop her. She will run rampant and horrible over Britain for a decade, a terrible woman who does terrible things. She will win election after election, and her legacy will be nearly impossible to chisel out of the heart of the country even long after the sheer breadth of devastation she brought is clear. We are in history here, and there is no height to which one can ascend in order to find a solution to it. You can't rewrite history. Not one line. Much as one wants to, much as one is desperate to.

But one can always rewrite fantasy. One can always rewrite Doctor Who. One must. It demands it, demands endless action, endless mercurial play. It is enough to say this of *Logopolis*: it could have been the end, but the moment was prepared for.

Proceed to the next essay.

Return to the start.

Now My Doctor: Tom Baker, Part Two

The temptation here was to just see if I could get Gareth Roberts to let me include his essay "Tom the Second" here, it being, in almost every regard, the definitive defense of the Graham Williams era. But even there… well, look, far be it from me to criticize one of the best critical essays in the history of Doctor Who, but Roberts's essay is really just an excessive amount of detail added to the only defense the era really needs, which is that, as he puts it, "The Doctor Who stories of the late seventies are hugely, magnificently and squarely entertaining."

It's true, you know. I said last volume that the Tom Baker era has an odd split for me, in that the Hinchcliffe-era stories got VHS release much earlier than the Graham Williams stories. On average, the Hinchcliffe era was released in 1990, making it the earliest average era to be completed save for the set of five complete Troughton stories that existed when VHS releases began, which on average came out in 1989. The Graham Williams era, meanwhile, came out on average in 1997, three years later than the average release for the much-despised Colin Baker era, with Season Fifteen having an average release year of 1999 – the latest average release of the entire classic series. What this meant was that for almost my entire childhood, the Tom Baker era consisted of the Philip Hinchcliffe era.

Which was, for me, a problem, because the Graham Williams era looked incredibly fun. I mean, sure, its reputation was a bit rocky, but this was the era that had been script-edited by Douglas Adams, and had, depending on how you counted, either two or three stories by him. It had the Key to Time, which sounded absolutely brilliant. It had Romana, who, when played by Lalla Ward, was apparently the best companion ever. And, of course, it had my Doctor.

There's a case to be made that the era benefited from not actually being available, in other words. Certainly there's much to be disappointed with in the Williams era, most notably Season Fifteen, which really is one of the rockiest stretches the series has ever faced. And yet for all of that, a best-of selection of the Williams era – say, *Horror of Fang Rock*, *The Sun Makers*, *The Ribos Operation*, *The Pirate Planet*, *The Androids of Tara*, and *City of Death*, although you could swap out any of those save for *City of Death* for your own personal favorite – can stand up to the highlights of any other era with credible pride.

And ultimately, this isn't an essay about the dodgy bits of the era. It's an essay about what there is to love. So while this may be an era that requires us to cherry pick, it's not an era that requires us to be anything less than unabashed about our love. And ultimately, for all that there were many sub-par stories in the Williams era, the bits that were brilliant really are as good as their reputation.

The first thing that has to be said is that the Williams era is funny. This

seems like it should go without saying, given that Douglas Adams was responsible for a healthy swath of it, but it's still worth stressing, not least because of the historical phenomenon of people who wanted Doctor Who to be less funny. And while you might be able to make some sort of attempted distinction between the "smart humor" of *City of Death* and the "childish humor" of, say, the "Teach Yourself Tibetan" gag in *Creature from the Pit*, you'd set yourself up for something of a tricky job explaining why the same distinction doesn't apply to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* or *Fawlty Towers* or any other comedy that has jokes other than its best one.

But the successful use of comedy in this era isn't just down to Douglas Adams. You've still got Robert Holmes around, being wickedly, savagely funny in key places. You've got Tom Baker, who, while he was more eager than he should have been to center every single scene on himself, was and is a first-class comic actor with good instincts that, as with any comic figure, required a collaborative environment to hone. And you've got less-often heralded figures like Mary Tamm, who is spectacularly good at playing the straight woman to the antics of everybody around her, and Louise Jameson, who manages to find new and interesting ways to fit her rather strange character into everything going on around her no matter how dire the scripts.

The result isn't a program that can consistently make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. When sub-par scripts, bathetic special effects, or actors who don't take their jobs seriously show up, as they are wont to do, there's not enough to mount a salvage operation. But there's a basic underlying backbone to the series that can and often is successfully built upon. The show is inventive and funny and, once again we return to that word, fun.

All of which comes to a head in Season Seventeen, when Tom Baker is given the co-star with whom he had the best chemistry. The off-screen gossip can at times intrude on the on-screen reality, but it's worth stressing the basic fact that Tom Baker and Lalla Ward are an absolutely electrifying pairing. Part of this is a structural change. Tom Baker, for his preceding five seasons, had always worked with a co-star who was playing the straight woman, in a variety of ways. The double act at the heart of most of the Baker era has Baker as the clown and the companion as the voice of reason. Even with Leela, the job of the companion in the Fourth Doctor era involves, in part, rolling your eyes at the Doctor with some regularity.

It's certainly not that Lalla Ward doesn't do plenty of eye-rolling; indeed, it's central to her character. But she also evolves the job in a significant way. It's telling that Season Seventeen marks the point where Tom Baker's time as the Doctor finally surpasses Jon Pertwee's. His Doctor is as known a quantity as is possible to have at that point in time. Now, it's the job of the straight man, in general, to behave predictably, to feed situations to the other part of the double act. With Tom Baker having been the Doctor for over five years, Lalla Ward is freed up to be surprising, responding to Baker with a sort of knowing indulgence that lets her be as funny as he is. Lalla Ward's Romana makes the job of eye-

rolling a comic role in its own right.

And yes, there's a vanishingly small window where this is possible. At first only Douglas Adams really gets the potential of the pairing, which means that *City of Death* and *Shada* are the only two stories tailored to the pair. And as part of Nathan-Turner and Bidmead's reaction against the perceived faults of the Williams era, they consciously don't make as much use of the pair's comedic skills, although it turns out that not even removing all of the jokes can actually get Baker and Ward to stop being brilliant on screen.

That word, actually, seems important here. "Brilliant." It's certainly a word that's been applied to *City of Death*, which is in many ways the high point of the era. I'd use it elsewhere as well – I think *The Ribos Operation* is properly brilliant, for instance. Likewise, *The Pirate Planet* and *The Sun Makers*. But it's worth looking at the particulars of all of those stories. Even what I suspect most people would agree is the least of them, *The Sun Makers*, is almost dazzling in its conceptual complexity. Its first scene, with a man being informed that his father's total assets are not worth as much as the raw materials of his corpse, is one of the most bitter and subtle jokes of Robert Holmes's long career of subtle bitterness. Something like *City of Death*, on the other hand… well, we can leave this as an exercise to the reader. Explain the plot of *City of Death* to someone in a way that makes it sound a quarter as good as it actually is. It's terribly difficult, because the concepts involved in *City of Death* are all horribly elaborate in a way that makes explaining the plot of most Moffat-era stories seem trivial.

And yet on screen, it all seems so effortless. This is perhaps the biggest advantage and millstone around this era: it always makes it look easy. On its frustratingly common bad days this is a problem, as that's not exactly when making it look easy comes off well. But on its also pleasingly common good days, there's a confidence and appeal to this era that nothing else can match. It would be decades before people tried plots quite this baroque with quite this much focus on being fun and charming about it. Most of the time, we talk about Doctor Who with the attitude that it's a good thing when it's doing things no other show could do. But the Williams era, at its best, is doing things that even Doctor Who couldn't manage at any other time.

And, to return to the base point, when it does this, it is invariably fun. Looking at my list of six Williams-era stories to pick as a best of, it occurs to me that they are disproportionately stories that I think of as fun. Even if, when cornered, I might concede that I think grim epics like *The Curse of Fenric, The Caves of Androzani, The Ark in Space,* or *The Power of the Daleks* are the better stories, the truth is that if I were to throw on some classic series Doctor Who for the sole purpose of entertaining myself for ninety minutes, I wouldn't pick any of those. I'd pick *City of Death*, or, if I was a bit tired of that one, *The Ribos Operation*. And even past those two, which make my all-time best list pretty effortlessly, I have to admit that watching *The Androids of Tara* or *The Creature from the Pit* sounds like a lot more fun than watching a supposed classic like *Earthshock*. Heck, even a largely sub-par Williams effort like *Nightmare of Eden* or

The Invasion of Time sounds more likely to make for a fun evening with some gin and snacks than most Doctor Who would.

And that's, in a nutshell, the argument here. Because whatever else might be said, whatever problems there might be, the stories covered in this book are ones that are very, very easy to just put on your television and have a good time watching. One of the most basic pleasures of Doctor Who is watching a charming and clever man be charming and clever; watching the Doctor be the Doctor is and should be fun. And there is no era that delivers that pleasure more directly and adeptly than the Graham Williams era.

About the Author

Philip Sandifer lives in Connecticut and writes about many things.

He is the co-author of *Flood*, along with S. Alexander Reed – an overview of They Might Be Giants' landmark 1990 album for Bloomsbury Academic's 33 1/3 series.

He is the author of *A Golden Thread*, a critical history of Wonder Woman, which you can take $2 off the price of by using the coupon code KS25K at https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/369810

He blogs at philipsandifer.com about Doctor Who and British comics.